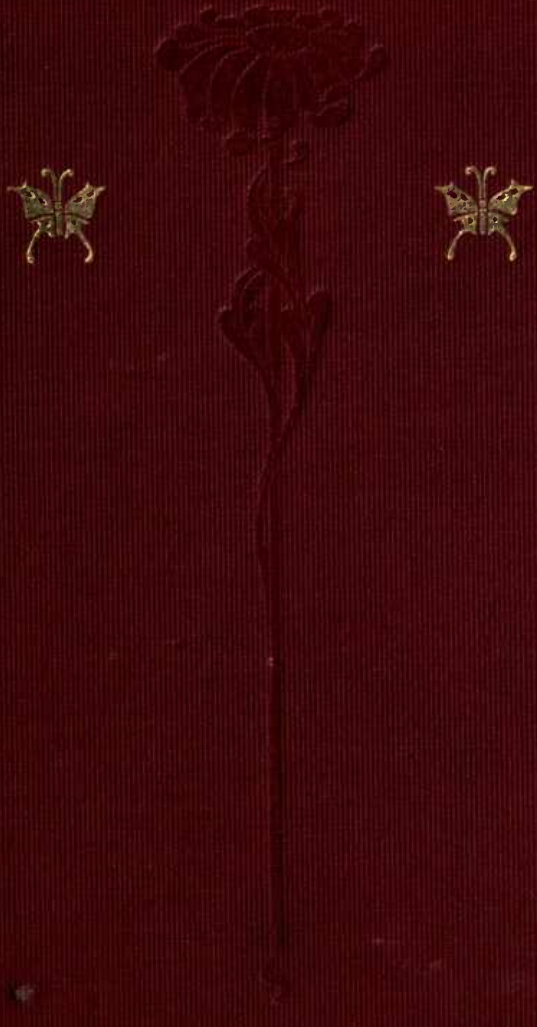
Nancy the Joyous

by Edith Stow



NANCY THE JOYOUS

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JAMES
McCRACKEN

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By

Edith Stow

Frontispiece by James McCracken

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To My Mother

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NANCY THE JOYOUS

ANCY LYNN was not really so pretty as she had the reputation of being. But a subtle something in her, of which she was quite unconscious, stirred the blood the way it responds to the first subtle touch of spring. Other girls have tendrils of wood-brown hair that stray down across their cheeks, but with Nancy you had to fight down an impulse to touch them wonderingly. Her eyes were that violet blue of twilight, when the insistent voice of adventure whispers softly to you from behind the hills. It was, most of all, this distant, mocking call in her eyes that set men struggling to unhamper their feet and follow her. It made

other girls seem too tryingly near to a man; in fact, around in his way.

In his contemplative fashion, John Carter feasted on the sight of Nancy Lynn perched high on the arm of an old-fashioned mahogany sofa in order to catch the waning daylight on the book she was reading aloud. He was seated at the other end of the sofa listening dividedly. Mostly he was wondering how he had ever won the love of such a girl, or was planning ahead for the days that would give her to him. Meanwhile, Nancy read blithely on, tilting the sentences up at the end in a cheerful fashion of her own.

The room about them was the staid village parlor of an elderly spinster cousin with whom, for the time being, Nancy Lynn was living as a kind of companion. It had haircloth furniture and a Brussels carpet with large figures designed in the spirit of miniature formal gardens. The mahogany center table was littered with a couple of books, a box of candy and a quantity of magazines, pamphlets and letters which Carter had brought with him from the afternoon mail. The books bore difficult technical titles concerning commercial and diplomatic conditions in the Far

East, for Carter was waiting an appointment to an under-secretaryship in the legation at Peking. The subject of which these two talked oftenest was the home-spot they were to build together. That it was to be far off on the other side of the world was unimportant to the girl. She had youth and health and her first taste of love. Therefore all other circumstances life offered her seemed both trivial and satisfactory.

So Nancy from her high seat on the arm of the sofa read buoyantly on:

" ' The Chinese are past masters in the culinary art, and the delicacies seen at a good Chinese table are fit for a repast of Lucullus. Bird nests, shark fins, deer sinews, bird tongues, fish brains, shrimp eggs and many other extraordinary dishes make up the everyday menu.' "

Nancy dropped the book into her lap.

" How — " she began emphatically. Then she caught sight of the abstracted expression with which Carter was enveloping her.

" I don't believe you heard a word," she accused him.

" Not much," in his candid way.

She reread the paragraph.

"Do you really think, dear, you'll enjoy seeing your wife eating a bird's nest?"

Carter slipped along the sofa and gathered her hands into his. Apparently Nancy took no notice of this.

"And won't you get nervous watching her balancing a fish's fin on a chopstick?"

"I'll enjoy her —" he began gently.

But here she interrupted him. Nancy Lynn interrupted a man whenever she felt so inclined. This was one of the rare moments in which she gave expression to her tenderness. She laid her soft cheek down against his forehead.

"To think," she whispered, "of going off with you into a fairyland of birds' nests and fishes' fins —"

He was sometimes vaguely worried by her fancies.

"You must not expect too much, little girl. Life is life," he warned.

"— and temples and heathens and diplomats," she continued in the same level tone.

Then, having been perverse as long as she cared to, she raised her cheek from where it rested and gazed into his face.

"Don't wŏrry for fear I can't meet realities," she assured him. "You forget that most all my life I have been an orphan handed from relative to relative. The one main thing orphans have to learn is to be adaptable. They do it by seeing things just as they are and fitting themselves in. So don't worry about the birds' nests, dear."

Then her underlip began to tremble. She glanced out the window.

"Everything in my life has had to be whittled down so as to fit into someone else's rough edges," she said huskily; "and then I'd move on and have to whittle it down some more. Even my father and mother have had to change to suit what the people I happened to be with remembered of them."

John Carter gathered her hands in his with a closer pressure. Nancy responded to his sympathy with a plucky readjustment of her mood.

"The one thing I have had all for my own was David, because none of them had ever heard of him. They thought I made him up, but I didn't. David? No, of course you don't know. He is someone I can remember father and mother talking about. They used to say that

they would have him plan for me in case they were both taken. He was the fortress of my soul. When life grew too prickly for a very little person to bear alone, I'd swing on the gate and think of David. The winter I stayed with Cousin Sarah I remember threatening my doll to leave her behind when he came for me unless she'd say 'God bless all the relatives' at the end of her prayers. But she wouldn't. How could she God-bless a woman that sewed different sorts of buttons up the back of your pinafore when she had enough of one kind saved away in her sewing basket?"

He drew her down beside him into his arms.

"You'll never again be lonesome, dear," he whispered.

"Won't I?" she whispered back, so slowly that it sounded like a doubt. "Won't I?"

IF you have ever been in love you will understand that Carter succeeded in convincing Nancy Lynn that she would "never again be lonesome." When the outer door had closed behind him, she stood in the hall listening to his receding footsteps and smiling softly. The parlor, when she crossed to it, seemed still to hold his presence. The littered table suggested him, the disordered sofa, the angle at which he had pushed a chair in passing. She felt his voice whispering to her from out the shadows and in the air of the room his arms seemed wrapped about her. The most precious part of girlhood is its dreams. She dropped into the chair he had so lately vacated, laid her arms along the edge of the table and her face down upon them, completely enthralled by a sense of the present sweetness of living.

It was half an hour before she raised her head. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes starry with happiness. She stretched her arms out across the table, rejoicing in a little easeful strain that ran along them.

Her eyes caught sight of the staid row of elderly, joyless portraits looking down from Cousin Eliza's walls and she waved them a kiss from her fingers.

"God bless all the relatives," she said out of the fullness of her happiness.

Cousin Eliza's complaining voice called querulously from above.

"Nancy, it does seem to me it's about time you were coming up to bed."

"All right, cousin," she answered cheerfully. "As soon as I straighten this room."

Nancy set the furniture back in prim lines, all the time pleasantly conscious, as though her heart hummed a little tune to itself, that it would not be long before she would have a home of her own.

"You won't be there," she said decidedly to the portraits

She straightened into its place on the sofa a

cushion covered with black haircloth and stuffed hard with curled hair.

"There will be soft colors and rugs and bare floors," thought Nancy.

Last of all she rearranged the mahogany center table, neatly stacking the magazines left for her to read and tossing into the wastebasket some worthless pamphlets and letters John Carter had left behind. She drew from the volume she had been reading aloud a letter that Carter had torn in two and thrust into it for a bookmark. Instead of tossing it at once into the basket, Nancy unfolded it.

"Perhaps it is something I should save," she thought, glancing along the typewritten lines.

Directly under the rough edge where it had been torn across were the words:

"Your cousin, being summoned out of town when on the point of writing you, wished me to forward the following message at once, because he has your future very much at heart."

"'Because he has your future very much at heart,'" she reread. She bent upon the paper a grateful smile. "I have, too," she whispered softly; "so I think we'll be friends when we

meet. Perhaps I'll even hang your portrait on the wall."

She bent to toss the paper into the waste-basket but some impulse prompted her to look again to see if this were really something that should be destroyed.

"John didn't read it. He must have thought it a typewritten circular. I don't think he knew it was a letter."

As she read further down the sheet the girl's face turned suddenly white. It was from some cousin through whose influence John Carter's appointment was to come. This cousin intimated that he suspected Carter of having become interested in some girl in Chatterton. Then it went on to warn him that while he had shown marked gifts for such work as he was being sent to, he had not yet proved his ability; it was still in the promise. The East just now, it said, is a land full of new opportunities; there are careers in the making there; but in order to fit himself to its conditions the young, untried man must not go hampered. The government requires that its new men in the consular service in the East shall be unmarried and shall not

marry for four years. But the cousin insisted upon more than this. He demanded that Carter should refrain from binding himself with any ties which might later, in the sweep of new and wider opportunities, be found irksome. Carter would have to choose between "this girl" and his cousin's influence in getting the appointment to a secretaryship. "Your cousin wishes me to assure you that he takes this stand because he has your future very much at heart."

Nancy Lynn's flesh slowly stiffened to her bones as though it had frozen there. She slipped sideways into a chair and stretched out her hands, with the letter shaking in them, across the table. She read it and reread it. Her teeth began to chatter. Then suddenly she clenched her hands into two fierce little fists, crumpling the paper between them.

"Because you have his future so much at heart!" she panted. "If I had your heart here, I'd dance on it and I'd dig my heels in!"

After which burst of passion she laid her head down on the table and sobbed huskily. But slowly her sobs quieted. She did not raise her head but thought and thought heartbrokenly

until her flesh shivered and a fine ache came into her wrists and ankles and between her shoulders. Carter must not lose his chance in life for her sake. It took her a long time to work it all out, because her mind fumbled so. There were lapses when she only thought stupidly how cold she was.

At last Nancy Lynn must have fallen asleep, for she awoke with a start when the clammy morning twilight was creeping in at the windows. She was still cold, and the ache was still between her shoulders, but now she wanted passionately only what would be best for him. Now that anger and surprise had passed and she could reason clearly, she saw that she could not trust Carter to choose for himself; he would cling to her, of that she was certain. On her part it could not be mere passive giving up, but active renunciation.

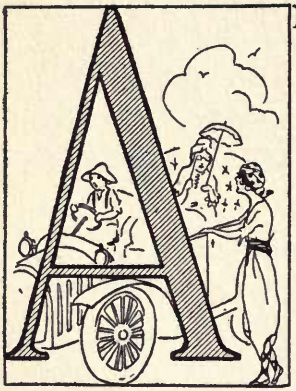
She drew a sheet of paper toward her to write — to whom? The cousin? She did not even know his name. The secretary then. "I am the girl you wrote about to Mr. Carter. He did not read your letter. I got it by mistake — fortunately." Then she offered to make a bar-

gain. She would give him up if in return they would promise that he should never know. "I would not spoil his career," she ended with a sigh that threatened to turn into a sob.

"He has not read this letter and he must never learn of it," thought Nancy. "It would not do for him to grow to hate the man who can give him his chance in life."

At the end she signed the single letter "N."

"Then they can't answer it," she thought with a scornful sob. "Think if they should try to thank me!"



FTER the mail box had irretrievably swallowed her letter, Nancy Lynn turned back up the street, nodding a white face to her neighbors. At home, her feet dragged so on the stairs that she could not have mounted to her bedroom had it not been for the assisting pull of her hand along the banister. In a kind of daze she removed the pretty dress she had put on for John Carter's call the afternoon before and hung it away. Then suddenly with a blind rush she crossed the room and threw herself face downward on the bed. Her body was shaken by sobs which she fought back by pressing her wrist against her lips.

Human nature is made in layers that work largely independent of one another. Now and then some earnest man, like Savonarola, by the heat of a single purpose, fuses his whole nature

— and loses his sense of humor. Then, there are women whose emotionalism soaks into their upper crust of spirituality and their under crust of brains until they become like unpalatable, juice-sogged pies. But, God be thanked, there are in this fine old world innumerable men and women who live true to pattern. Such was Nancy Lynn.

Time passed. At last from some hidden corner within the girl spoke up a fresh, brave little voice.

" All the same you've got to send him away," the voice said. " It was a straight bargain."

Nancy did not respond.

" You've got to do it," it said a little louder.

Nancy stirred.

" How are you going to do it? " it asked next.

Nancy turned over and lay face upward, gazing quietly at the ceiling. She had merely moved out of her emotions to another layer of her being where the brain functions.

To be sure, she asked herself, how was she to do it? And to her surprise she found it was not such an easy thing as it had appeared the night before.

Suppose, for instance, that alone in the heart of a desert were you and a man who knew you loved him. Not an easy matter to jilt him! You might say that you had grown to care for someone else; but there would be no sign of another man along the sky-line. You might feign to be jealous; but of whom? Or you might quietly run away. Where could you go in the desert that he could not follow and find you, and having found you, what reason could you give?

The hamlet of Chatterton was not, strictly speaking, a desert, being composed of flag pavements, slant-roofed wooden houses and a row of stores offering various kinds of merchandise. Notwithstanding, in some ways it closely enough resembled a desert for the parallelism to remain.

A starving girl who pushed back food and accepted the state of starvation again, such was Nancy Lynn; for as we humans need food, we need love and a home wherein to shelter love. With one of the strange paradoxes of life, the thing that enabled Nancy to bear the first days of her renunciation was the fact that she could devise no plausible method of carrying

out her promise. She brought all of her ingenuity — with which she was amply endowed — to bear upon it. Sometimes she thought futilely until her head ached; and sometimes, pushed to the edge by her problem, she turned like an animal at bay and was amused by the difficulty of her situation.

"It's as though Nancy Stark had been prevented from going to battle because she couldn't find her sunbonnet," she laughed with a catch in her voice.

In this mood Nancy Lynn fled one morning from under Cousin Eliza's querulous exactions. The main street of the village merged into a rutty highway, muddy in spots where the branches arched above it and hard-baked where it lay under the open sun. It was bordered on each side with a tangle of coarse, dusty grass, but the air above it was pierced by bird calls and sweet with the breath of clover. The road passed tilled land and small, moderately comfortable, moderately tidy farmhouses. Here and there some back-lying field sent out to it a lane, bush bordered and cut by the infrequent wagon tracks into lush ribbons of green grass. Nancy

went a short distance into one of these lanes and sat down on a granite boulder lying half grass-embedded in an angle of the rail fence.

The warm sunshine lay upon her hair and spread across her young shoulders like a tender arm laid over them. Its warmth began to send a sense of rest along her nerves. Her taut muscles relaxed in response. For the first time in many days she gave up passively, as a tired child does.

The problematical aspect of her sacrifice had engrossed her for too many days and nights to be shaken off; but now instead of groping back and forth along the blank wall of an impossible situation, Nancy sat in the sunshine drawing caricatures of her problem. Suppose, for instance, that she should some day meet the Crusty Old Party who had rejected her. She devised for him a series of highly picturesque discomfitures, each one terminating in some triumph of her own over him. She even thought up bits of conversation to be used by her on these gratifying occasions. Nancy decided, since this person was enough of a man of position to keep a secretary, her only chance of meet-

ing him was through her great-aunt, Mrs. Amelia Crubb. This relative, whom Nancy had never so much as seen, was the wealthy member of the family, a childless woman who some twenty-five years before had introduced Nancy's pretty mother into society, with the idea of arranging for her a wealthy marriage. The plan worked pleasantly until the first Nancy fell in love with gentle, studious, impecunious, unpractical Herbert Lynn, and insisted on marrying him in defiance of her aunt's wishes. Thereupon Mrs. Crubb summarily dropped her offending niece.

As Nancy sat in the sunshine, devising pleasant, triumphal situations, two gypsy women came towards her down the lane. One was an old woman with bent shoulders. The other held herself erect and carried on her arm a basket of laces and notions covered with a red bandanna handkerchief.

The relaxation in the open sunshine had brought back the light to Nancy's face. She regarded the two gypsies calmly and in return the elder of the pair studied Nancy shrewdly out of the corner of her eye. After she had fully

passed, she turned and approached Nancy.

"Would the pretty lady like to know her future?" she asked.

Nancy turned her hands over in her lap and gazed down at the lines of her palms, wiggling her fingers over them tantalizingly.

"There's nothing in the world she'd like so much," she replied in an even tone.

"I'll tell you what you're going to do," persisted the gypsy woman.

"You couldn't possibly," returned Nancy in the same even voice. "I haven't an idea myself what I'm going to do."

The elder gypsy laughed; the young one with the basket smiled.

"Someone loves you," coaxed the fortune teller, peering down into Nancy's palms.

"Yes."

"And you love someone."

"I certainly do."

"And I see a journey."

"Oh, no, you don't. I'm not going."

"Not for you — for him," amended the gypsy.

Just then, outside on the highway into which

this lane ran, sounded the rattle of an automobile. It stopped at one side of the entrance to the lane, so that it was hidden from view by a fringe of bushes, but the voices of its occupants could be plainly heard.

"Man," called out a woman dictatorily. She was evidently speaking to someone walking along the road and the pause indicated that he had stopped in response to her salutation.

"Is this the road to Chatterton?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me where I can find Miss Annie Laird Lynn?"

"Never heard of her."

"Oh, yes you have," commanded the voice. "I'm summering over at the hotel in Fair View and I've come all this way to look her up. I'm her great-aunt. You have certainly heard of Miss Annie Lynn."

"Never knew of any such person," responded the man with rustic finality; and continued on his way.

Miss Annie Laird Lynn, hidden from this authoritative person by the bank of elderberry bushes, gasped in astonishment.

"That must be my Great-aunt Crubb," she cried, throwing out her hands.

Nancy's grasp of the situation was both prompt and final. First, it was impossible for her to step out and make known her identity, accosting her unknown wealthy relative along a country road, like a rustic, with rumpled hair and dusty shoes. Loyalty to her dead father and mother forbade it, for this gentle pair had made Mrs. Crubb their one point of pride. At the same time it was equally impossible for Nancy to let slip an opportunity for studying at closer range this legendary person.

She sprang to her feet.

"Trade," she whispered hurriedly, thrusting into the basket of laces the silk scarf knotted around the sailor collar of her dress and taking in exchange the red handkerchief. Drawing her curls down in a tangle about her face, she bound the bright cotton square about them. The loosened neck of her dress fell open, showing her slender white throat. As a final touch she tucked up one side of her skirt under her belt, like a stage gypsy.

"She'd never recognize me if she saw me

again," she cried, delighted at the adventure of it.

She ran down the lane, beckoning to the others to follow.

" Come on," she called to them.

The auto stood at the side of the road. It was a clumsy old car kept to rent to summer boarders. To-day it was being run by a country boy of about fourteen, reduced by his present patron to a spiritless condition. Beside him, with one ungloved hand resting on the steering wheel, sat Mrs. Amelia Crubb. She was a large, solid woman, handsomely gowned with the quiet perfection of good taste. Had life placed her in narrow circumstances, she would probably have nagged. As it was, being wealthy and generous, she merely domineered. Managing the affairs of others was to her a kind of fountain of youth. Her large flat face was sallow, but it gleamed with the light of her keen, not unkind, gray eyes.

Nancy, bent on mischief, advanced to the auto.

" Would the pretty lady like to have her fortune told? " she pleaded softly.

Her voice and manner were a delicious imitation of humble petitioning.

"Is this the road to Chatterton?" demanded Mrs. Crubb.

Nancy disregarded the question. She laid two slim hands on the car and raised to Mrs. Crubb a pair of pensive eyes.

"I can tell the pretty lady what will happen," she pleaded.

Mrs. Crubb was a woman of too much good sense to dress younger than her years; but of all things, she most loved girlhood. Her interest was at once attracted.

Standing on tiptoe, Nancy leaned over into the auto so that she could gaze on the hand laid on the wheel.

"I see that someone loves you," she began.

"Oh, pshaw!" laughed Mrs. Crubb.

Nancy, herself, felt inward quivers of mirth; but she tilted her chin and gazed up reproachfully. This brought her face close to Mrs. Crubb's ample shoulder. It was a witching face. Even framed in its tangle of disordered hair and bound with red cotton, it suggested a flower. But rarest and most compelling of all were the

girl's deep violet eyes with their lurking hint of mockery. Her coquetry was so spontaneous that it fell alike on men and women, on young and old. Mrs. Crubb had a moment's benefit of it.

Nancy drew back so that she stood with the other women. Meanwhile the idea was occurring to her that if she could only induce her great-aunt to retrace the road she had taken, to a certain crossway, and to come into Chatterton by a highway parallel to the one she was now on, she, herself, would have time to run home cross-lots, slip into a fresh dress and receive her august relative ceremoniously. This seemed to her a fit ending for the adventure.

"It would even look well if I kept her waiting for a few minutes," she considered.

"Were you going to Chatterton?" she questioned.

Mrs. Crubb replied that she was and asked if they could give her any directions how to find the young woman whom she wished to meet.

"You won't find Miss Lynn if you go this way," said Nancy with decision. "You'll have to go in by the other road if you get her." And

then she gave Mrs. Crubb directions for her circuitous route.

The conviction in Nancy's voice was evident and Mrs. Crubb acted on it without hesitation.

As the boy climbed out to crank the auto Mrs. Crubb demanded, "Have you ever seen Miss Lynn?"

"I've heard of her."

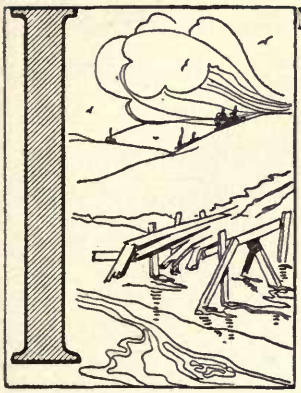
"What have you heard?"

Nancy lifted her eyes devoutly.

"That she is gentle and pious and good."

The auto began to move.

"Humph," said Mrs. Crubb.



N the best of spirits Nancy bade good-bye to the gypsies and started out to reach the village speedily. While she crossed the road her hands searched for the knot of the handkerchief. Failing to find it, she ran on, still wearing the bright kerchief bound about her curls.

In order to make a shortcut she followed the lane in which she had met the gypsies, until this opened into a grassy meadow. Across it she cut diagonally. This brought her to a worked cornfield where her haste was impeded by her feet sinking in the ploughed ground. But at last she reached the opposite highway at a point halfway up a long hillside. Here was a rail fence to climb. As Nancy laid her hands on its top rail she saw that they were grimy. She turned them over critically and found their palms

traced with delicate brown lines gathered from similar fences. A downward glance showed that her shoes and stockings were spotted with mud. Obviously it was impossible for her to reach the village in time properly to freshen and gown herself to meet her relative. Nancy's hands gripped the top rail rebelliously.

In a deep-seated way Nancy Lynn knew that she was not really so thoroughly disappointed. Already a bodily sense of relief ran through her sagging nerves and muscles because now they would not be forced through the little scene of vainglory which Nancy would certainly have enacted before Mrs. Crubb in loyal memory of her parents. But here was the last straw. The last straw is seldom either dignified or pertinent. She crossed the fence and stood irresolutely in the wayside grass.

"Then why hurry so! Why do anything!"

Nancy dropped down on a boulder and wrapping her arms about her knees, buried her face in them. With a fierce joy in the abandon of it, she held it up as a grudge between her and God that she had not been allowed to meet her great-aunt again. Throughout the past anxious week,

Nancy Lynn had known scarcely one selfish thought, but now selfishness claimed its own from her.

"Good morning, Miss Nancy." The voices sounded just above her head.

She looked up and saw two workingmen standing in the road in front of her.

"Good morning, Tom. Good morning, Mr. Martin." Half the people of the countryside were her friends.

"You weren't planning to go back by way of the bridge, were you?" suggested one of the men, nodding towards a wooden structure that spanned a river below the hill; "because it isn't safe. It wouldn't hold up a child. It'd break through like a shavin'."

He went on to explain that some of the stringers had rotted and had been removed in order to be replaced.

"If you see anybody coming this way you'll warn 'em, please, miss."

"But you have left some danger signal, haven't you?"

The men looked guilty.

"We're coming back directly," said one of

the pair. "We're just going up here to get the stringers. It takes the two of us to handle 'em."

"We didn't have the makings of a danger sign. But nobody hardly ever comes this way," added the other.

They plodded on, making as good speed as possible on the up-grade, their humble figures fitting into the quiet country landscape. Two facing hillsides sloped together. Through the narrow valley between them a little river flowed towards a hamlet whose rounded treetops were pricked through by a pair of church spires. Close at hand, the trees bordering the road filed majestically up the hillside on which Nancy sat. There had been a day when she and John Carter had ridden horseback beneath these same trees and the very ground had sung beneath their feet. Nancy buried her face again at the memory of it. What was she to do with the empty years ahead? How was she to meet them? With what was she to fill them? Here was a selfishness so august that it quieted her.

A rattling sound broke in on these thoughts. A big, clumsy old car came toiling over the crest of the hill. It was Mrs. Crubb again.

Mindful of the bridge, Nancy waved her hand and stepped out to the edge of the road.

"You!" exclaimed Mrs. Crubb.

"Yes."

"How did you get here?"

"I came crosslots."

"Well, you can tell me. I say that we are not on the right road."

"This isn't the way I told you to come," agreed Nancy.

"There," said Mrs. Crubb to the boy.

They had been having trouble with the car and altogether she was disgusted with her errand of hunting up an unknown relative with the mild reputation of being "gentle, pious and good." Now this gypsy girl —

But at that moment, under her gaudy, scarlet kerchief, the gypsy girl's face turned ashen. On the crest of the opposite hill, silhouetted against the pale sky, sprang up the figure of a horseman who sat his saddle with the ease and bearing of the riding schools. The clear-cut vision dropped from the sky-line and became a brown spot riding down towards the death-trap awaiting him at the bridge.

"Oh!" gasped Nancy huskily. "Oh! Quick!" she cried, turning to the occupants of the car.

Her alarm was hieroglyphic but contagious. Thinking the danger theirs, the boy promptly jumped over one side of the car and Mrs. Crubb rolled out the other. There it stood, empty, in the road before Nancy. Into it Nancy leaped, her hand reaching for the brake. She slipped it and waited. "He's riding down to the bridge, the broken bridge!" she whispered dryly. Would the car never move! It began to roll under gravity; then she felt a tug beneath her and knew that she was on power.

Down the opposite slope dashed the horse and man, both keenly alive with youth and energy, spinning out the road behind them with desperate steadiness.

The heavy gypsy wagons which had passed that way in the morning had cut deep ruts in the highway. Following in these, the machine lurched from side to side. Nevertheless Nancy stood up, one hand on the steering gear, the other high above her head, waving the red kerchief.

"Back! Go back!" she shouted, trying to force her voice above the clatter of the car. There was no thought of self now.

The man on horseback waved back a signal and doubled his speed. With a pricking sense of dizziness, Nancy knew that she could not make him hear — could not warn him. He would ride onto the bridge and go down before her eyes.

Then she saw the way. Amid all the quiver and rattle of the machine, with fear trembling in her fingers and chattering her teeth, her soul grew a lake of peace and resolution. She would make the bridge first and he would see her fall. Not even the bravest can look death in the face and not feel a pang of anguish; and Nancy Lynn was not one of the bravest. But with a steady pressure of the lips she answered the chill which ran through her. After all, what what was her life to his! She was only Nancy, with whom no one had ever been able to live.

She sat down and threw the car into high speed. With a fresh spurt it bounded forward. The race was really on now, with death waiting at the goal as the prize. Aside from its violent pitching in the ruts, the car vibrated in every

part. It kept on gaining speed terrifically, but every minute was precious. She must make the bridge, she reckoned, at least twenty feet ahead of him. The trees were in front of her; with a single leap they stood alongside. The bushes were a blurred green ribbon. The current of air stifled her and blurred her eyesight. So she dashed down to the bridge that was to "break through like a shavin'."

The car struck the planks with a leap and skidded, reaching midstream. There was a crash behind. The engines raced madly as the hind wheels hung over the splintered edge. There, for a flash of time the car wavered. Upright in it stood Nancy Lynn, her face glowing with victory, one hand holding a flutter of red lifted high above her head. In the instant during which the car hung down, driven in like a peg between the broken sections of the bridge, Nancy seized the opportunity to throw herself over its side into the stream to escape being drawn under with the wreckage. With a great rending of timbers and splash of water, all went down together.

The distant hamlet with its rounded treetops pricked through by a pair of church spires,

looked as if it had been cut out of paper and pasted against a wall. A flock of sparrows, drinking along the river, fluttered up to the bushes with a brief chorus of protests. But soon they dropped back to their drinking and bathing, for those drifting timbers, so they decided, would not harm them; neither would that occasional gleam of scarlet.

By the time Mrs. Crubb, panting heavily, reached the foot of the hill, Nancy was on the bank held close in a pair of stalwart arms as though they would never again let her go. Her face was radiant with love.

"I had to do it," she was answering him. "It was the only way to save you."

Then she caught sight of Mrs. Crubb and drew herself up lithely beside him.

"Aunt Crubb," she announced proudly, "this is a friend of mine, Mr. Carter."

Then at that lady's look of amazement, Nancy gave a quick, soft laugh.

"Oh, yes; and I'm Nancy Lynn."

"You are!" gasped Mrs. Crubb. "Then you're a fool. He isn't worth it. No man living is."

But however brusque her tongue, her gray eyes gleamed with pride. She turned with delighted fierceness on the boy who stood gaping at her side.

" It's worth the price of the car to know that one of my blood had it in her. Do you hear? You go home and tell your master that."

HERE is a type of American business man who works himself up to success because he has the virtues of aggressiveness and fineness of feeling. He is also nervous, sensitive, egotistic and national. When one of these men is at the head of a business system, his personality permeates down through its parts, making it all aggressive and high-strung.

There is still another type of eminently successful man who is both American and universal. His fundamental qualities are health, intelligence, honesty and industry. To these are added the virtues of imagination, courage, sense of justice, the desire to serve his times and the ability to deduct judgment from experience. It is a list of high qualities and men of the type are rare. The combination, when it occurs, is generally found in men of middle years. This is

because men of this kind make a late metamorphosis from their chrysalis state of earnest, thorough, intelligent young fellows with high personal ideals.

The cousin whom Nancy Lynn had dubbed the Crusty Old Person, being versed in men and affairs, believed with deep-seated satisfaction that he discovered promise of such things in John Carter. As yet Carter was only the earnest, thorough, intelligent young fellow with high ideals. His friendships were mostly with older men. If he had had less foundation on which to build, John Carter would have been a plodder. As it was, he was what is called solid; a quality that the world admires yet somehow bewails in a young man.

Some ten years or so ago America discovered the weakness of her consular system, especially in the Far East. To remedy this she established in Peking what might be called a consular college. Picked men go there, receive instruction in diplomacy and are sent to various consular posts of the East. John Carter selected this as his field of endeavor and in his thorough way planned a university and graduate course to that

end. Then, instead of going on through the consular instruction at Peking, which is under the Civil Service, he was offered an under-secretaryship in the Peking legation, which comes by appointment. When he concluded to adopt this change of plans, he selected Chatterton as a quiet, uninterrupting corner of the earth in which to work out certain statistics of the American market which he had been asked to tabulate in order to bring with him recent, definite information.

In Chatterton fate lay in wait for him in the guise of Nancy Lynn. He maintained a high level of ideals as to the attitude of men towards women; but after he met Nancy Lynn these generalizations went to the four winds of heaven. When he thought of Nancy Lynn he thought of just Nancy Lynn. He was desperately in love. There are innumerable ways of being in love; probably just as many as there are different kinds of girls. In his case it was as though the well of life, which had always been monotonously thirst-quenching, had suddenly pumped up a single glass of sparkling champagne. He found Nancy confusing but altogether adorable.

He did not suspect her of being the immediate cause of the variety of trivial circumstances that had arisen to prevent his seeing her during the two days that had passed since the incident at the bridge. When he lamented them over the telephone, so did Nancy. The thought of her wild down-hill ride to save him stirred him to the depths, yet that was now two days back and he had not succeeded in seeing her alone.

At last fate favored him. But hungry as he was for the blue of her eyes and the touch of her lips, as he walked to her through the dusk along the village streets, he was inwardly repeating, " Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life — "

The door of the house stood open to the summer night. Nancy Lynn was moving restlessly about the mahogany and haircloth parlor when she caught the sound of Carter's quick, eager step.

" Come in," she called blithely.

The next minute his arms were about her and his lips bent to hers. But there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, John Carter! Quick as a flash, Nancy, with her two palms laid against

his chest, had pushed herself away from him and had tilted up her face mockingly.

"Good evening, Mr. Carter," she remarked leisurely in a delicious imitation of Mrs. Crubb's heavy voice.

The husky tones, coming from Nancy's fresh lips, were ludicrous. He laughed outright in sheer surprise. She laughed, too; and slipped from him around the corner of the claw-legged mahogany table. When he started to follow, she reached out her hand to him across it.

"Good evening, Mr. Carter," she repeated with bewitching drollery. Only, somehow, it was pathetic to find Nancy brought to mere repetitions. Suddenly she bent and laid her cheek on the back of her hand as it rested in his. Her eyelashes brushed his wrist. But the next minute she was ornamentally entertaining him with a rollicking account of the call she had that day paid Mrs. Crubb.

"You certainly won her. She told me she had no idea there were such quite presentable country fellows in this back section of the state."

Once more they laughed together.

Nancy explained how she had taken the train

to the station nearest Fair View, where Mrs. Crubb was summering, and had there hired a conveyance to drive her over.

"It was costly," she conceded in a lavish tone, "but it had to be done. For my mother's sake I had to show her that I understood the correct social courtesies. I sent up my card and she hurried right down. I think she was not yet convinced that I was not really a gypsy. She was afraid she might find me downstairs selling laces to her friends."

Here Nancy's manner changed.

"But I did manage to please her," she faltered.

She drew a piece of typewritten paper from under a book and stood rolling it between the table and the palm of her hand.

"I promised to go to the city and live with her."

"Do you think that is wise, dear," he objected. "She impresses me as a most difficult person to live with."

Without replying in words, Nancy raised to him a flushed face on which was written a set determination.

" Of course, a winter in New York would be a big experience," he conceded, " but I'm afraid it would end in trouble for you. I'd rather think of you, those years that I am away from you, as waiting safe and happy up here among these good village people."

Still Nancy's only answer was the established purpose suggested by her whole lithe figure. Carter was vaguely troubled by it.

" I'm only thinking of your happiness, my dear. You know your mother could not get along with her."

" Yes, but Aunt Crubb may have mellowed since then."

" Mellowed! "

They looked into each other's eyes and burst out laughing together.

" Oh, she might be worse," insisted Nancy, still laughing.

" Yes. She might carry a bayonet."

Then Carter waved the whole matter aside. There came into his voice the note of strength and tenderness that a big, clean man saves for the woman he loves.

" We have plenty of time to decide that. I

want to talk about that day at the bridge. When I think of it — "

"No," interrupted Nancy steadily, "we haven't plenty of time. I'm to leave day after to-morrow."

"Day after to-morrow! But I don't go for six weeks yet!"

Now that Nancy had made her opportunity, she persevered relentlessly. Womanlike, she began far off on the outer edge of the situation.

"I'm sure I don't know why she wants me. There does not seem to be a thing about me that suits her. She said my dress was a fright but that she'd order me some new ones; and my hair has no style, but she will have her maid do it."

Nancy tried to smile at these sallies but the muscles of her face were stiff.

"She says that she has not a doubt in the world that she can marry me to a million."

"But you are going to marry me!"

"No. No, I'm not. I've changed my mind. Aunt Crubb says I don't know the world. She says that every girl ought to see something of the world before she is in a position to decide."

This was so unlike Nancy that try hard as

she might to speak naturally, she said the words in a tinkling, ineffectual tone that failed to convince Carter. He was perplexed and stern. Both of Nancy's palms were braced on the table now to steady herself.

"Aunt Crubb promised to let me wear some of her diamonds," she persisted.

Carter's voice was low, controlled and very patient.

"Nancy, I know you too well. You can't make me believe it of you. Why, my dear, it would be nothing more nor less than selling yourself."

She gulped and nodded her head.

"Yes, I know it."

"Nancy!"

She began again rolling the typewritten paper under her fingers.

"I asked her if I could wear silk stockings and she said yes. Just think, I've never owned — "

"This is no time for levity," he said sternly.

"No," she agreed. She was so anxious to agree with him in all that she could.

"Put that paper away," he commanded.

She slipped it under a book.

" Thank you." Once more his voice was low, controlled and patient. " Now listen. I want you to follow me."

There was a magnetism in his quiet intensity which held her eyes fixed on his.

" If you think, Nancy, that you could do such a thing, I understand you better than you understand yourself. It is just a sudden, present temptation. Some day, when you are your better self again — "

" I haven't any better self," she answered with a little wry smile.

His voice dropped a note lower.

" Then I have more faith in you than you have in yourself. You think you mean this, but you don't."

" Yes, I do mean it. I've promised not to marry you."

" Promised! " he exclaimed.

Nancy nodded her head.

" I promised I'd have nothing more to do with you."

Carter's words came quicker. His next remark was merely the leader for a line of argument.

" You had given me your promise. You know

you had no right to make another while that holds."

It was an excellent line of argument; but in a way thoroughly characteristic of her, Nancy's answer held a surprise which scattered it to the winds. An expression of conviction quivered across her face. Her eyes looked into his with absolute honesty in their purple depths.

"That's so. I never thought of that," she said simply.

His voice rose in pitch. The flesh of his face turned gray.

"You never thought of it! You mean that you made such a promise without even thinking that you were breaking your word to me?"

"Yes," she answered with a truthfulness that could not be doubted. "I never once thought of it. If I had, of course I wouldn't have done it that way."

"May I ask what you were thinking of?" he inquired with ironical courtesy.

Nancy shuddered. She drew out the paper again for the support the sight of it gave her. Then, remembering that her fumbling had displeased him, she slipped it back.

"I was just thinking about what I was buying y — about what I was buying."

"And planning how to get me off your hands, I suppose."

"No," she said truthfully, "I didn't think about that either. I didn't think about that until later. It's been harder than I thought it would be."

Carter softened. It would be difficult for a man's heart not to soften toward her with that beautiful, honest, steadfast face before him.

"Harder than you thought to give me up? That's because down in your heart — "

"No, that isn't what I mean. I mean that it was harder to find a way to — "

"Well, you have found one," he answered, recoiling with a bitter laugh.

They both waited. The clock on the shelf ticked loudly.

"So this is what love means to you," he began again scornfully.

She flushed but made no answer.

"And you are the girl I believed — Shall I tell you what I was thinking about you as I came here to-night? I was saying to myself, 'Greater

love hath no man '— Oh!" he ended contemptuously.

Nancy swayed towards him and whispered, "'— than this, that he lay down his life —'" She spread her arms wide in a sudden appeal. "That's so. Greater love hath no man." She caught hold of the back of a chair and gave a heart-breaking laugh.

"What do you know about it?" he said bitterly.

Nancy made no reply, pressing her lips together to keep them silent. She rubbed the back of her hand across her eyes as one with a headache does. When she looked again he was standing with his hand on the doorknob. At this, the purpose she had reared seemed all to crumble and fall within her. Her blue eyes grew wide with anguish.

"Nancy, you don't mean this. Think once more."

"Yes, I mean it."

The knob turned in his hand with a click. She reached out her hands impulsively.

"Say good-bye to me," she begged.

A red surge of anger swept across his face.

"Good-bye. A man's lucky to be rid of you."

"Oh, don't! Don't say that!" she cried out piteously.

But the door had closed between them.

RS. AMELIA CRUBB returned from a summer in the country, bringing Nancy Lynn with her.

"I can't bear to get old," she announced in her hard, dry voice at the reception given to introduce her pretty relative, "so I brought the girl back with me for the sake of having the young set come to the house. They wouldn't do it to see an old woman like me. My elderly banter is too sage for them. Young fun is so frothy," she ended enviously.

This remark was audible to Nancy, standing on the opposite side of the drawing room with a group of stalwart young men gathered about her.

"So you see," she commented amusedly, "I'm merely a voice crying in the wilderness. You're the wilderness."

To her friend, the Bishop, Mrs. Crubb dilated

on the subject of her newly acquired guardianship even more intimately.

"I had practically forgotten there was such a child," she remarked in the running tone of a showman. "She is my niece's daughter. Named after her, Annie Laird Lynn. You remember Annie? Why, yes, of course; you were around the summer she spent with me at the coast."

Mrs. Crubb now focused on the subject reminiscently.

"It would have been a good deal better for Annie Laird if she had taken you," she said in her harsh way. "I told her so at the time. I used to say, 'Hubert may be nothing but a young minister but he isn't over-sanctified and he is the kind to make good in even a poor business.' But after she had once set her heart on Herbert Lynn there was no talking her out of it. A tramp's life he led her, too; always moving on from place to place with the wolf at their heels. I remember telling him once, 'If you haven't any consideration for Annie, do think of the wolf. It's getting hard on him.' I will say though," she added, with a touch of generosity for the

dead, " that to the end they both kept up the ' loaf of bread, the jug of wine and thou beside me ' attitude."

The Bishop's thoughts trailed backward with distaste over solitary years of ceremonious dinners served him by the wives of church officials. Slightly as his face contracted at this vision of the loaf, the wine and the voice singing on the wilderness' edge, Mrs. Crubb detected it.

" Oh, nobody minds what I say," she commented. " But to come back to Nancy," she continued briskly. She was a woman much more interested in the present than in the past. " I found her living with some of her father's people in a village near our hotel. There was only one eligible man in the place so far as I could learn. I told her, ' For goodness sakes, don't think you are in love with him. Wait until you see some of the rich young men I've picked out for you.' "

She folded her hands and smiled complacently over the vision of what she intended to do for her new protégée. Mrs. Crubb's complacency was the kind that argued ill for any difference of opinion on the part of her niece. At this particular moment, however, that young lady's ideas

appeared to be entirely in harmony with her aunt's.

The Bishop's eyes sorted over Nancy's beauty, making comparisons. Even where he noted differences from the Annie of other days, he conceded with a glow not unlike the pride of fatherhood that the living girl was rarely beautiful.

Mrs. Crubb followed the Bishop's gaze across the room.

"Reminds one of her mother, doesn't she? The same zest for happiness, the same originality, and such an appreciation of the flesh-pots of Egypt. Half rations in the wilderness has worked her up an appetite."

She threw up her heavy chin with a laugh.

"Her first real tailor-made suit was sent up this morning. When she saw herself in it in the mirror she cried, 'Oh, Aunt, I didn't expect anything to fit like this till I got to Heaven and wore feathers!'"

Mrs. Crubb gave another short laugh.

"You can't blame the young folks for clutching at the good things of life," she chuckled condoningly. "What do they care about the kind of sentiment folks talked in my generation

and that was still popular in yours. Nowadays it's success that counts. It is all they hear about. Take Nancy, now. With her good looks she'll cut a path straight through to marrying a million. And I stand ready to back her in it."

The Bishop was shocked by this open avowal of worldliness. He felt an aversion for this old woman who was more modern than the youngest person in her set.

"You do the girl an injustice; you misinterpret her nature."

"And I'm not a fit old person to be entrusted with the keeping of the young," Mrs. Crubb chuckled.

"This is merely a temporary phase with her, a first feeling of largess," he insisted. "She is her mother's daughter."

"Also, she is my great-niece."

The Bishop merely shrugged his shoulders at this indisputable fact.

"And her father, if ineffective, was still a remarkably fine man," he argued.

Instantly Mrs. Crubb changed into quite another woman and there leaped between them a feeling of old comradeship which kept them

friends in spite of what at times amounted almost to dislike.

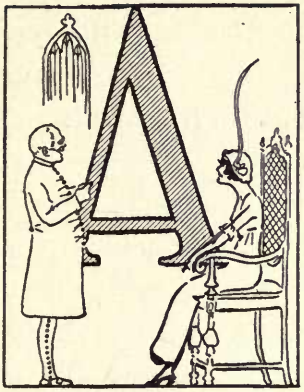
"You certainly have grown in grace, Hubert," she said.

The man would rather not have put their friendship to the test of words. Nevertheless he replied,

"The hand of the Lord is full of compensations."

"What was it in your case? A bishopric?" slipping back into her other self.

He paused before he answered. "Well, for one thing, here's Nancy."



S a voice crying in the wilderness, Nancy Lynn succeeded even beyond the exactions of her great-aunt.

"I never knew a girl so popular," she boasted. "And she doesn't seem to try, either."

For nearly two years now — that is, ever since Nancy came to live at her great-aunt's — the Bishop had dropped in almost daily. Out of these two people Nancy made for herself a kind of family circle. She insisted, for instance, on the Bishop's taking a personal interest in her new gowns and her social triumphs; and he dotingly allowed himself to be dragged by her along the paths of her enthusiasms.

"She is a lovable girl," he remarked during a visit when Nancy chanced to be absent. He missed her lyric presence in the house and was

trying to fill the void he felt by talking of her.

"She is a girl who wears her faults on the outside, exactly as though they were pieces of jewelry," answered Mrs. Crubb, with fine appreciation of faults.

"That has nothing to do with it. She is just lovable."

"Oh, you men!" expostulated Mrs. Crubb. "See here, Hubert," she explained philosophically, "if a girl chooses her faults with discretion it amounts to the same thing."

"What is this I hear lately about Peyton Williams?" he questioned sternly.

"Her latest," announced Mrs. Crubb with a triumphant wave of her hands.

The Bishop had a vision of a bullet-headed American business man, wealthy beyond all reason.

"You don't mean Nancy considers him seriously!"

"I don't know anything about her plans. That is why I respect the girl. But I'm backing him."

"She wouldn't think of marrying him. He is too old for her; and there is nothing in him to

answer the call of her spirit or call to hers."

The poetry of this was beyond Mrs. Crubb.

"I should not have said that he had it in him to fall in love, either," she said in a tone of agreeing. "But it seems he could not resist the sight of Nancy talking to the younger men. It will be a great triumph for her."

"I am going to talk to her about it," said the Bishop severely.

"So am I," chuckled Mrs. Crubb.

But the Bishop never had an opportunity for his fatherly counsel, for only a week later while off on a diocesan visit, he read in his home paper the notice:

Mrs. Amelia Crubb, at a reception held this afternoon, announced the engagement of her great-niece, Miss Annie Laird Lynn, to Mr. Peyton Weston Williams of this city.

The newspaper dropped from the Bishop's hands. He removed his nose-glasses with deliberation and with deliberation snapped them into their case. Then he sat looking off stupidly, while a wave of protest rose within him. Finally, since he realized that he was helpless

against such a combination as Mrs. Crubb and Nancy, manlike he determined once for all to wash his hands of both ladies. But it is not such an easy matter, he found, for one to whom she had shown favor to flick Nancy Lynn off the surface of his thoughts.

On his return it hurt him to discover her apparently without emotion in regard to her engagement. The matrons of her aunt's set said she was gaining poise. Everyone remarked on the wonderful physical endurance with which she was meeting a continued round of ante-nuptial functions. Later, the Bishop, practiced analyzer of souls, detected a slight pressure of her lips when she was silent and by this he knew that she was keeping her mind concentrated on certain financial facts of her engagement. Her fiancé she favored with a sweeping, impersonal graciousness.

No one but Nancy noticed that the Bishop absented himself almost entirely during this season of complimentary functions; but even she did not realize how closely he was following them from a distance. "The pageantry of the sacrifice," he called them.

It was like an Indian summer in the life of Mrs. Amelia Crubb. She was radiant and vivacious concerning all this feting. Nancy always referred to the functions as though they were given in honor of her aunt.

"They give Aunt Crubb a luncheon and a reception this afternoon and a dinner-dance tonight," she explained to the Bishop during a short, unsatisfactory call.

The Bishop paid little heed to this remark. He was noticing that her face had grown thinner.

"Yes, but being a society girl is hard work," she explained to him. "You see, the upper circle depends for its very existence on the number of social functions it gives. We would not dare stop, because if we did we would just cease to be; we would become the middle class again."

A fine scorn ran through her words.

"At first I enjoyed sitting in the 'horseshoe' at the opera so much, but I soon discovered that to most of Aunt Crubb's set the music is a bore. And then I learned why we go to the opera. If we just maintained ourselves in complete and princely seclusion, the lower classes might forget that we were excluding them. Awful thought!

So we go and give them a demonstration of the fact to keep it before them."

The natural democracy of the girl was rebelling after two years of being stifled and concealed. Save the Bishop, there was no one in her present life before whom she dared to be her full self.

She brushed both hands across her eyes as though to clear their vision and then let them drop wearily into her lap.

"But the old society veterans and the people in the younger set that were bred for this kind of life have developed a sixth sense that helps them, a sense of exhibition. I haven't it yet; but by the time Aunt Crubb has finished giving her wedding I think it will have sprouted."

Some days later the Bishop sat alone in the library of his big, silent house. He had a fire burning on the hearth, for he was forced to acknowledge that of late he had grown to find comfort in palliating physical ease. He could not have told you the details of her entrance — perhaps that was because for an hour back he had been thinking of her — but suddenly he realized that on the hearthrug before him stood

Nancy Lynn. Her coat lay over the arm of a chair as though tossed there with some vigor, and she was resolutely drawing off her long gloves.

"I have come for some of the sustaining grace you preach about," she greeted him.

"What is the trouble?" he questioned.

"Breaking my engagement."

"Thank God!"

Half an hour later she sat before him in a straight-backed chair.

"I had to come," she was saying. "I couldn't seem to think it out around Aunt Crubb."

She outlined a pattern in the hearthrug with her foot.

"It happened yesterday," she explained slowly, as though confidences were difficult for her. "I ran upstairs and when I opened the door of my sitting room, there, spread out over a chair in all its trailing white glory, lay my wedding dress. You see, I came on it suddenly! I think I must have fainted, because the next thing I knew I was down on the hearthrug crying rust spots all over the brasses."

She glanced up bravely. Then, without an instant's warning, her eyes welled full of tears.

The Bishop's glance dropped. It was as though that elusive spirit in Nancy that called laughingly to men from a distance had crept close to him for sympathy.

"There's another man," she whispered.

She traced with the toe of her shoe upon the rug. When she looked into his face again, that something in Nancy had fled once more into its solitude behind the hills. But it left this middle-aged man humbled by the vision she had granted him of her essential womanhood.

The present Nancy Lynn sat smiling at him with whimsical practicality.

"*What* am I going to do?" she asked.

RS. AMELIA CRUBB scolded the Bishop over the telephone as though he had been a schoolboy.

"I hold you responsible in this business. You encouraged her in it."

"I told her if she had any misgivings by all means to withdraw."

"Well, then, you had no business to interfere. She is my niece."

"She is more than that to me," he answered gently. "To me she is like a daughter."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Crubb.

Life is not to blame that it grows commonplace to us. We are insentient to so many of its joys. For instance, the Bishop thought that he was anxious. In reality he was tasting a sweetness like rare wine in the way Nancy placed herself in his hands, relying on his judgment. It was not that his pulses quickened, as would a young

man's. Rather, the cooling blood in his middle-aged veins warmed again. He felt, as near as a childless man could feel, as though Nancy were of that blood. As with a real father, the difficulties of churches and ministers were for the time being overtopped by her perplexities, which he carried around uppermost in his thoughts.

He realized that her present position in her aunt's house was a trying one.

"I'm like a sheep at a shooting match," she exclaimed.

"It is no place for you — at least not at present. I shall have to send you away," he answered thoughtfully.

During the first days of Nancy's broken engagement a kind-faced, gray-eyed woman wearing out-of-date clothes passed through the city and stopped over a couple of hours, as was her custom, to call on the Bishop. He greeted her cordially.

"I am so glad just now to have a woman to confer with, Miss Schuyler," he said, and explained to her the situation.

"Her mother was an unusually fine woman. In fact, I never knew a finer woman. And the

daughter is like her, only she has never had a chance to expand naturally. Her childhood was spent among narrow-minded people who restrained her, and these past two years she has been with Mrs. Amelia Crubb. You know Mrs. Amelia Crubb? What Nancy needs now, more than anything else, is the opportunity to find her real self."

At the end of half an hour he concluded thoughtfully, "Yes. To spend the next three months with you would be the best possible thing for her."

So they arranged it between them and at his bidding Nancy went.

Hers was a vivid young personality that left behind it a sense of emptiness when she departed. This had been true even as a small child. By the death of her parents she had been left in a flock of Puritan souls, drab of wing. Her imagination, which made them preach to her luridly concerning the Prince of Liars, and her childish bursts of temper induced by their constant curbing of her temperament, made the succession of severe spinsters and elderly matrons who undertook her upbringing, despair and shift

her on. But each of them had felt a void when she had gone.

The Bishop missed her — he would not have believed how much he missed her. His house seemed empty; his work seemed empty; his heart seemed empty. As he sat in his library with his books unread about him, he realized that the years were creeping on him. He needed her lyric youth.

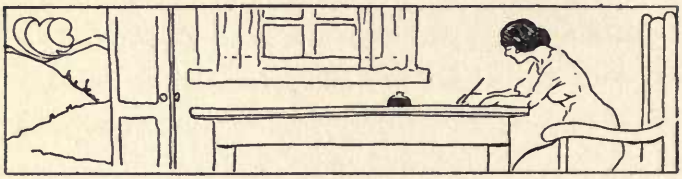
The Committee on Diocesan Finances was seated one evening about the Bishop's library, smoking and discussing division of funds. The head of the diocese was sunk deep in his chair, his loneliness prevailing even in the midst of this thick cigar smoke and interchange of men's talk. Into that loneliness had come a tinge of apprehension. Could it be that his judgment had miscarried in the new, strange life he had forced upon Nancy? As chilly and damp we wait beside a slow hearth for the fire to blaze up and warm us, so he waited for some reassuring message from her.

More than one member of the committee noticed his preoccupation. "Work is beginning to tell on him," they concluded.

When the maid entered with a tray of mail, one letter addressed to him in a crisp, round hand caused him to brighten visibly. An unwonted flush came into his cheeks. With fingers trembling with anticipation and apprehension he slit open the envelope. It was a letter from companion-loving, laughter-seeking Nancy Lynn on her way to a lonely missionary station in the heart of the Tennessee mountains.

He drew out the sheets.

" Gentlemen, excuse me."



Dear Bishop,

The clock has struck twelve. With the fiddlers three playing and the prince's ball at its height, I am changed back, like another Cinderella, and flee out into the darkness. You must have faith in your judgment, my fairy godfather, or you would not work such a change and send a girl like me off into an isolated mountain settlement. I have no courage of my own that it is wise; I am just trusting in yours.

Only I have been passed on so often that I make no protest. So here at a bend of the road I stop to wave good-bye and play you a gay little snatch of tune on my pipes, like any other true gypsy.

This has been a day of creaking up into the mountains on the stray raveling of a branch

railroad. Towards dusk it ran its nose into a cliff and stopped. I climbed down and found myself in an upland hamlet which clings to the side of the mountain. To-morrow I take horses. To-night I am staying at the village inn, a decrepit old hostelry with grooves worn in the tread of the stairs. When I mounted them and closed my door behind me, there was a clammy mustiness and an uncanny sense of presence in the room as though I had just frightened away a ghost. I drew a chair up in front of the table and sat down to wait until bedtime. Too much silence is over-stimulating; it is as bad as champagne. It was comforting, then, through the fog of my thoughts to hear the voice of my good angel speaking beside me. You know she is the only person I have in all the world who has the right to scold me. That makes me fond of her.

"Nancy," she began, "you've taken the trail again."

"And you have, too," I told her. "People who wear glass slippers mustn't kick."

"But it was not my choice," she protested.

And for a good angel she did look so worn

and so bedraggled that I really had to laugh.

"It is hard on you," I acknowledged.

"It is telling on my nerves," she complained, being a woman. "Consider now: Only two years ago you had never heard grand opera nor worn silk stockings, nor met a divorced person, nor eaten *pâté de foie gras.* Just as you get all the advantages of higher society and I think I can settle down for a bit of a rest, away you start again across the world."

"I couldn't help it," I pleaded. "When the missionary woman with the kind eyes asked me to visit her, and the Bishop told me to go, I had to. Even a good angel," I reminded her severely, "has to mind a bishop.

"Do you remember," I asked her, "how he patted me on the shoulder when he said good-bye at the station, and told me to come back to him such a woman as my mother was?"

"Nancy, I believe you're homesick," she said sternly.

And at that I put my head down on the table and laughed until I cried at the idea of a girl that has been handed on all her life being homesick.

"Now tell me," I taunted her, "whom have I to be homesick for? Aunt Crubb? You know, yourself, that she isn't exactly what you hanker for."

"It's the Bishop," she cried, as though she had made a discovery.

"Didn't you know that before?" I asked.

But to drop the nonsense — my good friend, I want to be honest with you. Don't deceive yourself in me. It is not courage that is sustaining me to-night. It is not even the gentle memory of you. Off here alone in this eerie old building I acknowledge that I'm a coward. I had to desert the firing-line or run straight across to the enemy. The enemy in this case is the other man.

That is a riddle but please don't try to solve it. To guess a riddle is so rustic, like cracking nuts with your teeth.

Good night.

Nancy.

May 22.

Dear Bishop,

Here I am in Swaggerty Cove.

At five forty-five yesterday morning a group of people full of friendly discouragements gathered to help me into my vehicle. They were undisguisedly perplexed that I should be going to Swaggerty. But then, so was I.

Yesterday I accomplished thirty-five miles of mountain road, most of the way clinging desperately to the side of the carriage in a vain effort to keep stationary upon some one spot of the seat. Great boulders lay in the middle of the road. Rock ledges shouldered arrogantly into it from the sides. Mountain streams flowed down and absent-mindedly occupied it. The carriage would give a wild jolt and send me springing into mid-air. Then, as I came down,

by some strange gyration the seat would jump forward and slap me soundly on the back. But the worst of all was a biasing skid of the wheels down some ledge, that gave the whole vehicle a side twist which snapped me from the waist upward as you snap the head off a snake. That changed my spine into a funny bone.

By the time we reached the people with whom Miss Schuyler had arranged for me to pass the night, the sun had begun to drop down in the sky and the first vague thoughts of night filled the air. The great mountain-tops gathered up purple shadows from the edge of the world and wrapping these about their shoulders, crouched down for the night with their heads on their knees. I thought I could almost hear them breathing.

To-day I mounted " Wings-of-the-Morning " and made Swaggerty Cove. " Wings " is a mule. I named him that because of his mighty spread of ears; though along towards noon when he disclosed a fondness for clinging musingly over the edge of precipices, I wished I had christened him " Parachute."

My dear Bishop, this place to which you have

exiled me is nothing but a handful. When I come home I'll slip it into my pocket and bring it back to show you. Two long, green, timbered mountain ranges stand side by side like two loaves of bread, with just enough space squeezed down between them for a narrow ribbon of bottomland, a slow valley creek and a stretch of villainous mountain road. Scattered along this are a dozen log houses. Behold Swaggerty! Honestly, now, do you think that is big enough to satisfy me? Every one of the dozen cabins is exactly like every other one. Suppose some day I should get to hankering for variety. But you have vouched for me and so for your sake I'll try.

Wings and I found the entire settlement out waiting for us. Miss Schuyler had been called off to the mountain-top to nurse a sick man, but she left word with them to care for me. She must have suggested something about my being tired or homesick, for Swaggerty took me to its arms. One old mountain woman lifted me down bodily out of the saddle and the rest gathered round, addressing to one another, sotto voce, such remarks as, "How snug she be built!"

"Law, but ain't her hair pretty!" It wasn't — "What piffling little feet!"

After they had taken my points old Aunt Hiley Ann, the mother in Israel who took me in charge, swept me away from them into her own cabin.

"Don't you know the young-un is all petered out?" she cried shrilly.

She seated me before her fireplace in a straight-backed splint chair while she stirred up with her leathern hands an awful dough of corn meal and water and baked it in a bed of ashes. All the time my fascinated eyes watched her, knowing I was doomed to eat it. But worse than that, the sense of homesickness I have been fending off every moment since I took my hand out of yours, was drawing in closer about me. It had me cornered. I couldn't seem to fight it inside those log walls with patch-quilts grinning from the beds and shotguns aiming at me from their pegs.

Do you know this was to have been the day for Aunt Crubb's bridal dinner? The walls were to be veiled with smilax and orchids, fragrant as spring and beautiful as the bosom of a sunset.

The centerpiece was to be a bank of orchids and grapes; and there wasn't to be a thing on the menu you could pronounce. I was to wear a "creation" — no, Bishop, that's not Biblical; it's a dress. I've worn creations for nearly two years now. This one was violet chiffon over pink messaline, designed, so Madame announced, with special reference to my complexion and eyes. Aunt Crubb told the Desirable Party what Madame said and he remembered it. I, myself, have only an impression that she considered me becoming to it. Aunt Crubb was to resign her place to it and it was to sit at the head of the table. As I sat there, watching that awful hoecake brown on top, I could have put my head down on my knees and cried for it.

What I want to-night is to lean my head against someone and sniffle. The Desirable Party is a good man, friend o' mine; he would have answered beautifully, and so I am almost lonesome for him. I do not dare want you, for you are the one that sent me away. When I think of that it is a challenge and it stiffens my back. Only I distinctly don't want my back stiffened; I want to cry. But I shan't.

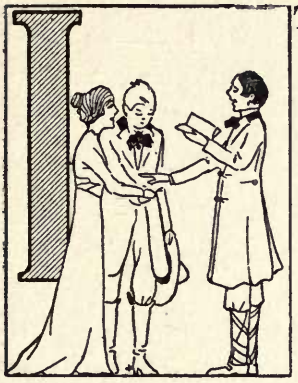
After I had eaten the hoecake — yes, I did — it was time for bed. Miss Schuyler had said that she might have to sit up all night, but that I was to make myself at home in her cabin and she would be back in time for breakfast. So here I am alone. She left word that I wasn't to be afraid.

When I was a little child and everything was at ebb, father and mother used to talk about some person they called David. Father would put his arms round mother and tell her if he were like David she would not have had to work so hard. Mother would smile and say that David was the best balanced man she knew and that she would put me in his care if they two were taken; but that it was his dear faults she loved father for. Afterwards, when they were both gone, I honestly believed that David would come for me. That first winter at Jones' Corners I remember threatening my doll to leave her behind if she kept on being saucy to Cousin Eliza. While I brushed and braided my hair to-night it all came back to me; and I wished, just as I used to, that he would sweep in and carry me away. But instead, here is a trifling legacy of his preparing

to spend the night alone among the moonshiners in a log cabin that has not even a lock on the door. I guess I'll hurry into bed. I'm tired.

Nancy.

May 24.



IT WAS the day set for Nancy's wedding. But instead of being in the center of a kind of white satin flurry, with a circle of smiling, tearful friends running at her least request, she was wandering aimlessly about a cluster of log houses. She had a feeling of lack of adjustment to Swaggerty Cove and to this particular day.

Nancy stood in the highway looking towards the mountain-tops as Aunt Hiley Ann came along from the spring carrying a pail of water. Setting the bucket down in the road, she doubled her fingers into her palms and rested her knuckles on her hips.

"You wouldn't have anything like this if you was back where you come from," she remarked with a kind of possessive pride in the landscape.

As Aunt Hiley Ann reached down again for her pail she added, as though condoning with Nancy for the disadvantages of her former life:

"But if us were all alike we'd get so tired of living we'd wish the old world'd sink."

Nancy laughed.

"Let me carry your pail for you."

"But I'm heartier'n you be!"

Then it came to this good old mountain woman that the offer was a mark of respect to her years. Years are no dishonor in Swaggerty Cove. She handed over the bucket and walked along by Nancy's side, her head held proudly as though it had been crowned.

About this time there jogged down the road a lank mountaineer on muleback, in one arm carefully carrying a large package. He was a messenger come all the way from the railroad, where he had been warned that the box was billed *fragile*. The man drew rein alongside and handed it down to Nancy.

"I reckon this be your'n."

"How did he know me?" Nancy asked Aunt Hiley Ann.

"Law, child, you ain't like us. You've got a

different kick to your heels when you walk."

Nancy began tearing off the wrappings, scattering them about her in the road. From out them she brought forth a rarely beautiful bride's bouquet of roses encircled by a shower of lilies-of-the-valley and orange blossoms.

"What be it?" asked Aunt Hiley Ann with awe.

"I should call it a silent reminder."

Nancy stood looking down at her flowers. A flock of bramble-scratched children had gathered and were shoving about her feet for the florist's wrappings. A cow that was wandering at large along the roadway stopped, pushed its nose in under her elbow and nibbled at the streamers.

"Shoo!" from Aunt Hiley Ann.

Then a sudden whim, half pain, half humor, filled Nancy. She gathered the bouquet up against her breast and spread mockingly across her face that rapt, far-seeing look of brides.

"Tum-tum-te-tum," she hummed. "Fall in behind, children."

Glancing back over her shoulder at them, she caught sight of the cow at the end of the line,

a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley, all slobbery, hanging out each side of her mouth.

"If only Aunt Crubb could see my wedding procession!" she cried.

So they marched up to the door and into Miss Schuyler's cabin, the last youngster kicking backward with his heels to drive off the cow.

"See my wedding bouquet!" cried Nancy handing it over.

In the center of the room stood Miss Schuyler in one of her plain, straight calico gowns. She held the flowers off from her in order to view them better, smiling softly as one smiles upon an old photograph.

"To think that I used to live in the midst of such beautiful things! What's this?" drawing out a card embedded in the flowers. "'Mr. Peyton Weston Williams.'"

She drew his wedding bouquet up into her arms and stood with its streamers swaying about her. "I used to know him. He is a very fine man, my dear."

"What am I going to do with it?" inquired Nancy. "You can't just throw your wedding bouquet away but —" glancing around the plain

little log room — " I could never live in the house with it. It looks so worldly and extravagant."

" Flura Jeems is to be married this afternoon," Miss Schuyler suggested. " You might take it up to her."

Nancy nodded assent.

" Good-bye, friends," she laughed, waving the little children out through the door. " I'm sorry, but you will have to excuse me. I'm going to a wedding."

The trail to Flura Jeems' led up from the valley road to a cove on the mountain-side, ending at the threshold of a single cabin. The door stood open but Nancy knocked — which was a very polite thing to do. The rest of Swaggerty would have walked right in. A stocky man bound about the brows with a strip of dirty cloth, and an apathetic little bride were waiting inside. They had heard about Nancy Lynn and were flattered by her coming. As an inducement to keep her for the wedding they assured her that a real preacher was " to do the j'ining," and not the usual justice of the peace.

Soon Aunt Reesy Devin, the mother-in-law-to-be, came up the trail to the cabin. Aunt

Reesy was a lank, grizzled old woman with keen blue eyes and an exaggerated spryness of movement which is elderly coquetry. Behind her walked the mountaineer bridegroom and a nice, black-garbed, earnest young fellow fresh from the divinity school. Aunt Reesy was too energetic for mere greetings. She stepped aside and hurried her followers into the house before her.

The young divine entered with a swinging stride. "Howdy," he called out cheerily in local parlance. But when inside the low-raftered, dirty little log cabin he discovered a girl, with a pair of wonderful violet eyes, holding a kind of floral monument, he stopped short and blinked hard. Nancy watched him do it.

"I'm the wedding guest," she explained softly.

He advanced with his hand extended frankly.

"And I'm the minister."

It at once occurred to Nancy that he would have amused her Aunt Crubb, but she liked him.

"Oh, please let me help you with the marrying. I've been making a special study of wedding functions."

He smiled his consent; in fact he smiled sev-

eral things, including his good fellowship and his admiration.

The mountaineers, who are wary and silent, watched with interest this offhand way of getting acquainted.

"All right, then," cried Nancy companionably; "you take the speaking part and I'll do the stage directing."

First she gave the bride the flowers to hold. This made Aunt Reesy so envious that Nancy took off her embroidered collar and pinned it around Aunt Reesy's neck.

"You're the bridesmaid and you're the groomsman," she explained to the elderly pair.

"What be they?" asked Aunt Reesy.

Nancy shook her head dubiously.

"What are they?" she asked, turning to the young preacher.

He was not taking the wedding as seriously as he should, for Nancy's spirit was contagious.

"The end men," he replied promptly.

"Exactly," agreed Nancy. "You stand at this end and you stand at that."

She arranged the four mountaineers, hitching and shoving one another, in a row, the bridal

couple in the middle. After she had them stationed to her satisfaction, the attending couple leaned forward and gazed into each other's faces, Aunt Reesy palpitating with excitement.

"Now mayn't I sing the wedding march?" begged Nancy. "Somehow I always felt that the organist is really the man that does the marrying."

"But this isn't your wedding," he answered, flushing around the ears.

"It came mighty close to being," she returned.

Already the young minister hated to deny her anything.

"I'm afraid we could not keep them in place long enough," he said gently.

He was right about it. The row of mountaineers was shuffling restlessly.

"I'll ride over some other day and hear you sing it," he suggested.

Then resolutely focusing his attention away from Nancy, he adjusted his ministerial voice.

But the bridesmaid interrupted him.

"I reckon, preacher, I be-n't in the right place," she said, slipping round to the other end of the line.

Nancy lead her authoritatively back and he began once more. Again the bridesmaid took a determined stand by the old man's side.

"Seems like this be the right place," she stated with a show of argument in her voice.

Nancy shooed her back into position.

"Go on," she said to him. "I'll keep her fixed with my eye; but be quick about it."

A chorus of voices gave the responses, the two lusty old ones leading. In vain they remonstrated. Aunt Reesy Devin was gleeful to the point of frivolity. But when the Reverend Mr. MacDonald was gathering up his hat and his riding whip, her movements grew perceptibly slower. Finally she faced him determinedly. She pointed a lean hand towards the groomsman.

"See here," she announced, "I don't want no halfway work. I wants to know whether him and me is really married."

Nancy coughed back a laugh.

"And that's what I wants to know," she demanded.

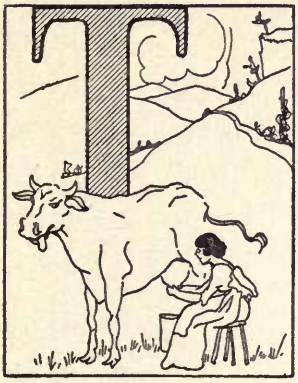
They two left the cabin and followed the trail together down to the point where it was joined by a little threading by-path that ran off along

the bench of the mountain. He had come by that trail and had tied his saddle horse at the heading of the ways.

It was just the hour when the bridesmaids and ushers were to have stepped back and Nancy Lynn was to have turned and walked down the aisle with her train and her veil and the man she had married and all his riches dragging like weights on her soul.

Alec MacDonald held the hand she offered him at parting and said something about marriage being the most solemn thing in the world. To his complete astonishment she cried bitterly, "I know it!" and turning, fled from him down the path. And as she ran the awfulness of the thing she had come so near doing beat like wings in her ears.

"Thank God I didn't," she whispered. "Thank God that at least I have a right to my dreams!"



THE Bishop carried Nancy's next letter around in his pocket until the envelope grew frayed. When he was alone he would read it, smiling to himself and saying, "Well, well, well." Sometimes he added, "Her mother might have written that letter." Sometimes, "All that about her caring for someone is just a notion of hers. She is virtually nothing but a little girl; *this* letter shows that. All she needs is a chance to expand." And then he would reread:

My dear Bishop,

Do you remember how it felt to be young and happy? I wake in the morning carrying a joy with me out of my dreams and I go to sleep with it at night. I wander in and out of the houses singing love-songs, which is scandalous in a land wholly given up to hymn-tunes. And everywhere, everywhere, opposite me on

the other side of the hearthstones, out in the field-rows where the men and women work, I seem to catch the hint of a face and sometimes I hear a voice.

This handful of log houses, instead of being monotonous, is as droll and varied as a child's story. Think of a land where a woman who wants a new broom goes out into the woods, fells a sapling and splits up an end of it into a brush; or a man who needs shoes like as not sits down before his hearth and makes them himself. I feel convinced that in the days when Mercury wandered the earth in disguise among the little old Roman settlements, the sandals he wore were of his own making. That would be part of his fun in pretending he was human.

Don't worry about me. The entire settlement is taking care of my mortal frame and the young minister is in charge of my soul. He has been over, thirty miles on horseback, three times since I wrote you last. My chances of Heaven look bright.

He says that gladness like mine is religion. I tell him it is no such thing; that it is fixing your eyes obstinately on love and stirring up your relations. He does not understand, the way you do, that when a girl gives you a peek into her heart that way, the comfortable thing all round is to change the subject at once. He would rather sit on the doorstep and talk encouragingly. But by the time he gets to be a bishop he will probably know better, too. In the funny old days

when you were carrying the dignity of your first ministerial black suit and the other Annie Laird wore sprigged muslins, you may have counseled her wisely and at length between father and David. I reckon your influence must have leaned towards father or you would not have written me that my old friend David had been "neglectful of a precious legacy." Neglectful? Never! What could he have done with a very little person that kicked when she got mad?

The sun is setting and I hear my friend Marget shouting her way down the road and singing out of tune at the top of her lungs. She is teaching me to milk and I can work both hands now, though I can't make them go at the same time. I see that in time I shall become competent and versatile. Now I am,

Your happy,

Nancy.

June 10.

O THE weeks passed, bringing Nancy Lynn new insight. Among other things, she learned that she was living in the house with a celebrity. Every now and then an earnest soul from some distant station rode into this valley for a conference with gentle, far-sighted Miss Schuyler. She would lay her hand on Nancy's arm and say,

"This is the little friend the Bishop sent in to brighten Swaggerty for us."

Then they would make a tapioca pudding, take down something from their shelf of precious canned goods and pretend they were having a party. You would not believe how festive they grew over a stray brother or sister of the fold and a stew of canned oysters.

But when Miss Schuyler and the visitor settled down to a discussion of the problems of their

work, Nancy sat listening in her corner, awed by the quiet enthusiasm of these people.

One day Miss Schuyler came in wearing a smile that made her plain face beautiful.

"A man over from Lonesome Creek has just brought me word that a friend of mine will be here for the night."

"Who is it?" asked Nancy eagerly.

"I am going to keep that a surprise," returned Miss Schuyler.

So they brushed and brightened the cabin until it took on a look of welcome and anticipation. Then they waited while the dusk thickened.

Nancy grew disappointed.

"She could not ride over as late as this."

"Oh, yes, she will. Riding in the dark never daunts her."

Soon they heard hoof-beats along the road and hurried out.

"I was late in starting," explained the guest, after the preliminary greetings were over.

In the dusk Nancy could know nothing of this woman's personality except the touch of her hand and the sound of her voice; but she was won by these. It was a voice that suggested organ

music; soft and strong, womanly yet full of vitality. She seemed to catch you up and bear you adrift on the full-flowing tide of her cheerfulness.

"I was late in starting. At the last minute I had to go over and doctor Aunt Letty. She sent word that she had 'the flippin' disease.'"

"Nervous indigestion?"

"Yes. I dosed her a bit and told her she must be careful what she eats. But Aunt Letty says 'I don't wanter eat what I oughter; I wanter eat what I wanter.'"

When they had pastured the horse and were near the cabin door, this woman waited a minute in the dark.

"I want one more breath before I go inside. I have had to be away from all this so long."

Nancy thought that in the "horseshoe" at the opera she had never seen a woman with so fine a carriage. But when the lamplight inside the cabin fell on the woman's face — Nancy shrank back from it!

It had one time been a beautiful face but was now hopelessly burned and scarred.

"Oh, how did it happen!" cried Nancy in a

distressed whisper. Miss Darrit had gone into her sleeping room to freshen up after her ride.

Miss Schuyler explained. Miss Darrit lived in a valley buried farther from the world, more deeply poverty-ridden and ignorant than theirs. Her home was an isolated, windowless log cabin. There had been much sickness on her mountain and once, when she came home from a night of nursing, she fainted and fell with her face in the ashes of the fireplace. The pain of it finally brought her to. Then she dragged herself up and, alone, ministered to her wounds until morning. Following this came weeks of suffering in a hospital. She had now just left the world again and brought the poor, marred ruins of herself back to her post.

"I did not tell you about her before for fear you would pity her."

"I would not dare pity a woman like that."

The bedroom door opened and Miss Darrit entered with a fine unself-consciousness that a queen might envy.

They drew the supper table up in front of the rude hearth of the cabin and sat talking about it until late in the night.

"I have been needed so badly while I was away," smiled Miss Darrit. "For one thing, the children have got into the 'church-house' and almost ruined my organ. As Aunt Letty says, 'You can't make much fuss on it any more. Some of the keys don't make any fuss at all.'"

Then, as usual, as the hours wore on they began to talk seriously and Nancy was but an outsider to it. Something gripped her heart when she realized that she was living among people who met life in this spirit. Nancy Lynn knew about sacrificing greatly for a person one loves, but these women were doing it for humanity. And humanity is such a vast, formless, cumbersome thing!

"Oh, yes, Miss Schuyler," remarked the guest as they rose at last from the table, "I have a message for you from a friend, a Mr. Peyton Williams. He was introduced to me while I was waiting at the gate to take my train, and he put me on."

"For me?" asked Miss Schuyler in surprise.

"Yes, he—"

"Are you sure it was for me?"

"Yes. He said, 'I have a friend down there

at a place called Swaggerty Cove. If you happen to meet her tell her I am always at her bidding.' "

Miss Schuyler's cheeks flushed slightly. Nancy bent her head over the table where she was gathering up the plates.

" I knew Mr. Williams once, but I think that was probably intended for Nancy."

" Possibly. You see I knew nothing then about Miss Lynn's being here."

Nancy raised her eyes to Miss Schuyler. She felt as though she had stolen the sacred silver vessels from an altar to play with.

That night when the lights were out and the cabin stood a formless shadow in the wide, lonely, formless darkness that spread out over the mountains, Nancy lay awake.

" I know now why the Bishop sent me in here," she thought. " It was to show me how trivial I am."

After an hour of wakefulness Nancy Lynn decided, just as many another young girl who carries an ache in her heart has done, that since these women had found peace, the way to ease her own pain was to stretch her soul out to the

proportions of theirs. She pulled away at it, the way you lay a carpet, and tacked it down all around with good resolutions. There was a stretch and a strain across the middle of it that hurt, but at last Nancy Lynn fell asleep, confidently believing that it would hold.

ANCY LYNN honestly believed that the beautiful flower of renunciation had taken root in her soul. She thought the tacks would hold; but suddenly, about three days later, pop! up they all pulled, and Nancy shrank back to her natural proportions.

Incidentally, a good deal of original sin had accumulated during those soul-stretching days and had to be worked off. The store-keeper of Swaggerty Cove was the first one to suffer. She seemed never to see the little store quietly locked up that she was not possessed with a desire to buy something. It stood in the heart of the settlement and to the uninitiated looked like a shed. Buying and selling in Swaggerty is largely a matter of barter, with eggs and chickens for legal tender. Nancy bought up a flock of her own — she opened a bank account, as it

were. She learned to pass an egg across the counter and ask for an egg's worth of matches while she gazed nonchalantly at the three bolts of calico on the shelf. She got positive joy from snatching up a live chicken by the legs and swinging it, squawking and protesting at her side, down the road to the store. There she pulled a bell-rope and sat down at the foot of the bell-pole with her hen for company until the store-keeper, who was primarily a farmer, finished his plough row or his pipe or his bit of gossip, and sauntered down the road to wait on her.

To this much-tried man's relief the young minister from Dry Branch arrived on horseback to spend a week in Swaggerty. He had lately been appointed in charge of a large belt of this country and had come over, as he said, to get acquainted with his people. He was to lodge with Aunt Hiley Ann and dine around among the folks. What he really did was to take Monday dinner with Marget. The rest of the time he spent at Miss Schuyler's "so as to discuss plans."

Young Alec MacDonald thought that it would also be well for Nancy to get acquainted,

so one day they sauntered together up the gully to call on Betsy Jane Skidmore. Betsy Jane was not exactly an exemplary character, but the social lines lie out broad and flat in that world. At the end of the call young Alec MacDonald glanced twice uneasily at Nancy and then, following circuit-preacher etiquette, asked if they might have a short season of prayer.

Betsy Jane was sitting tilted back on the hind legs of a straight, splint-bottom chair, smoking her pipe. She spread out her hands in cordial expansiveness and answered, quite as though he had asked for a drink of water.

"Jes' he'p yourself; he'p yourself."

Betsy Jane kept her seat. Alec MacDonald and Nancy knelt down on the puncheon floor and he got through with it somehow. He was embarrassed and Nancy liked him for it. For that matter, she was embarrassed too, for it was the first time she had ever walked into a woman's house and offered to pray for her.

After that Nancy decided to stay home and make the desserts and let Miss Schuyler go off with him rounding up the flock. But there were slow strolls through the lush grass of the creek

bottom in the purple twilight, during which Swaggerty, undisguisedly sitting out on its thresholds to watch them, concluded that they must be " fixing their love " on each other. And there were long quiet talks, sitting together on the cabin doorstep while the lights of Swaggerty one by one went out and the night became theirs.

Sunday morning Alec MacDonald held his first service in Swaggerty Valley. It was a beautiful, clean summer day, so the folks came down out of the coves and ridges and sat in rows across the little log " church house," their solemn faces raised to him. He had put thought into his sermon, in his thorough Scotch way; and he had put into it also a young man's enthusiasm for his own century. It was a good, logical discourse on the modern movement towards the brotherhood of man. He led them on with words and illustrations vividly objective, ending with a realistic description of the sinking of a ship at sea. These mountaineers had never seen the sea; in fact they had never seen more water than the creek and the mill pond held; but the stolid folk sat spellbound under the magic of his words which painted the line of men drawn up on deck

with the captain standing, pistol in hand, threatening to shoot down any man of them that stirred hand or foot until the sailors had put off the women and children.

Nancy felt the atmosphere of public opinion was a trifle too rarified but Alec MacDonald was gratified to the point of self-congratulation on the impression his sermon seemed to have made.

That afternoon Miss Schuyler had gone up into the mountain to visit one of her sick. MacDonald was sitting in the open doorway, not reading, but looking down at a book he was holding. Inside, Nancy's footsteps sounded back and forth across the cabin floor. Later, while thus busying herself, she caught the sound of protesting voices outside and looking up, discovered four of the Swaggerty men standing in a semicircle before the young minister. It was a delegation of the citizens.

"We come to say that throwing the women and children overboard and saving the men don't look right to us, preacher."

Nancy chuckled audibly; but when she saw poor Alec MacDonald sit resourceless before this mistrust of his chivalry, she realized that the

situation was grave. It was a question of saving his future influence in Swaggerty Cove.

She stepped forward and stood with her slim figure framed by the doorway.

" Uncle Lemmie," she began, " do you remember that the other day I called your sled a stoneboat and you didn't know what I meant? "

Nancy turned to the other end of the semicircle where stood the much harassed storekeeper.

" And, Mr. Teeter, you know yesterday you handed me down a horse collar when I went to the store for some paper and asked for a pad. ' Put off ' to us folks doesn't mean to throw the women and children overboard. It means to put them into the lifeboats and save them."

" Now, Mr. MacDonald," continued Nancy, " you tell them how last summer, when your steamer went down, you held up a perfectly strange girl with one hand and swam with the other for an hour until a boat picked you both up just as you were going down together."

Nancy disappeared, but a moment later stepped again to the threshold.

" He was out on a lake. That is a pond deeper

than the tallest pine tree and as broad as from here to the railroad. Think of starting out to swim to the railroad and dragging a girl along, besides. Make him tell you about it, Uncle Lemmie."

And once more Nancy retreated from the meeting.

Alec MacDonald took it so much to heart that after they had gone, Nancy went out and sat on the doorstep beside him. She began talking a long way off from the subject.

"Beautiful old mountain," she murmured, her eyes resting on the great ridge that reared itself up from the opposite bank of the long valley.

"I went up it again yesterday to see Betsy Jane Skidmore. Betsy Jane paid you as high a compliment as is possible in this belt of country. She said, 'I'd git up and quit eatin' fried chicken any day to hear the new preacher talk.'"

She was careful not to glance his way but let her gaze drop to the lean, brown highway that ran through the long valley.

"I used to think that was a villainous piece of road but now I've got feelings about it. It seems august to me, like the old Roman roads that

used to join the scattered parts of the world."

Having thus shied off again from the tender point, she allowed herself to scan him warily out of the corners of her eyes, and noted signs of his being reconciled to life again.

Uncle Lemmie was riding along the road below them.

" Uncle Lemmie must be going to see his son-in-law. Son-in-law has a sick horse. Uncle Lemmie says, ' The new preacher has sense. Us folks round here know a few things when we can think of 'em; but he has sense.' "

Then Nancy cast tact to the winds.

" There is one thing we have to remember in here," she began earnestly — so earnestly that she laid her hand on his arm. He quickly covered it with his. Nancy snatched her fingers away.

" Oh, say, no; let's not," she said boyishly.

" The thing to remember is that their mental store is limited to just what eyes can see, hands touch and souls reach towards, up and down our valley road. You have to pack away in your wardrobe trunk all your furbelows of thought and just gather about your feet this little heap of worn, patched ideas. And you have to keep

your eyes sighting along the line of their point of view. I discovered that lately when we celebrated Fourth of July here in Swaggerty. We held strictly to the purpose originally designed for the day. You would have thought that the British were stationed up there on the top of the ridge with cannon and bayonet, ready to descend at any minute. But I just followed around with the crowd and whooped her up with genuine enthusiasm because we had whipped the English. You have to keep not so much within their vocabulary as within their ideas."

Then Nancy's voice grew tender.

"It is just like talking to a child," she said softly. She stretched her hands out over her knees into a kind of cup, as though a child were kneeling there and she gathered its little face between them.

"Just play house and doll babies with broken heads; but within that little circle you can reach out and lay your hands on all the biggest things in the universe."

Nancy's voice trailed away into silence. She crossed her arms on her knees and laid her cheek down on her wrists.

"Did you know," she asked softly after a time, "that the Chinese are past masters in the culinary art? Bird nests, shark fins, deer sinews, bird tongues, fish brains, shrimp eggs and many other extraordinary dishes make up the every-day menu."

AUNT HILEY ANN was taken sick. This fact spread an air of importance through the settlement. For one thing, the doctor from Salt Lick came dashing in on his thoroughbred mount with a quick beat of hoofs. For an eighty miles of country the mountaineers proudly claimed the doctor from Salt Lick, yet drew back timidly from him. He swung himself out of his saddle in his hurried way and tossed the bridle to one of the bystanders; but he entered the cabin leisurely, as though he had merely dropped in from an afternoon saunter.

He was sitting by Aunt Hiley Ann's bed, counting pulse beats and looking at his watch, when he detected a kind of official stir and shuffle of feet among the mountaineers crowding the cabin behind him. He felt the presence of someone at his side, but waited until he had finished

counting before he looked up. There stood a girl whose slender figure conveyed an impression of worldliness.

"Is she very sick?" asked the girl.

"Yes; she is."

"But Miss Schuyler has gone off to a convention. I shan't be able to get her back for five days."

The doctor from Salt Lick grew stern.

"There is no need to send for Miss Schuyler. It is a bad case of pneumonia; but if you do just as I tell you to, I think we can bring her through."

His eyes did not swerve from their first focus on Nancy's face. They gave her no quarter. Moreover, their expression came close to being antagonistic at her dread of responsibility.

"All right; I will," she promised, squaring herself to meet his gaze.

"Then get me a kettle of hot water the first thing," he ordered turning a blank shoulder towards her.

Nancy was humbled.

Among the mountaineers it is the custom for the kinfolk to the most distant family ramifica-

tions to move in and camp around a sick bed with much gossiping and frying of chickens, smoking of pipes and fretting of visiting babies. Then the " lovering couples " of the settlement sit up nights with the invalid to do their courting. This is not heartlessness, but just the etiquette of sympathy and the old human hunger for excitement. Sickness in an isolated world is exciting.

With directness and authority, the doctor from Salt Lick sent all that cabin-full of people away with definite orders that they were to stay away. Marget was to have the care of Aunt Hiley Ann daytimes and Miss Lynn was to nurse her nights. There were to be medicines every fifteen minutes night and day and all manner of disagreeable duties.

When he had established this order of things and was prepared to leave, he asked for a drink of water and Nancy obediently brought him a dipperful from the bucket. He drank half of it, tossed the rest out into the yard, and flung himself into his saddle. As his horse started at a gallop, he turned and lifted his hat. In the door-yard of the cabin he was leaving stood a slim little figure, all its worldliness dropped from

it, watching after him with a pair of anxious violet eyes.

When he stopped for his professional visit the following day, he cast a scrutinizing glance around the place. The pile of ashes on the hearth showed that a fire had been kept burning there all night, according to his orders. A big iron kettle of hot water hung on a crane above it, ready for use in case the patient's temperature fell to sub-normal. The doctor was satisfied.

"What is this?" he asked, pushing his feet into a litter of whittlings on the floor.

Nancy smiled in a tired way but her voice was steady.

"Those are mine. I found that if you whittle it helps. I whittled most all night long. Looks like a cooper shop, doesn't it?"

"Good idea," he returned professionally.

Then he examined his patient, gave fresh orders and hurried away.

On his next call he inquired of Nancy how she was standing up under the long night watches.

"I met MacDonald on his way over here and I told him he must not come. I said Miss Schuyler was off and you had your hands full

now and needed all the sleep you could get."

"What did he say?"

"What does anyone say to the doctor's orders? Nothing. Just follows them."

"I like Mr. MacDonald," volunteered Nancy with a note of comparison in her voice.

"Do you? So do I."

On the following days Nancy was sleeping when he came, so he did not see her again until the early dawn of the seventh morning. Then one of his long, hard rides took him down through Swaggerty Valley in the gray morning twilight. The cabins lay silent and smokeless in this pocket of the big, mountain world. Only in the open doorway of one of them crouched a solitary little figure. It was Nancy Lynn. The doctor from Salt Lick saw her there, dismounted and sat down on the threshold beside her. They could scarcely discern each other's faces through the dusk.

"You need a wrap around your shoulders. This air is damp."

Nancy shivered but did not move. He slipped off his coat and laid it carelessly around her shoulders.

"Been whittling?" he inquired, smiling at the pile of shavings on the ground before her.

"Yes; only these last few nights I have sat out here on the step and whittled. I have been having the wide, soft, wonderful darkness all to myself and I've learned the faces of the stars."

"What do you think about?"

"About a bishop and a diplomat, mostly. I'm in good company."

"The hardest part of sitting up is after midnight. The strain is from then on until you begin to get the feel of the morning in the air."

"Yes; that's true," cried Nancy with conviction. "You are firm and set of purpose until the turn of the night and then something within you has worn out. About that time I seem to lose my hold on the bishop and the diplomat." Nancy laughed nervously. "Then every night a girl named Nancy seems to come laughing and mocking down the valley. She finds me sitting here alone on the doorstep, the way you did, and she tilts her chin and asks:

"'Who are you?'

"'I'm Annie Lynn,' I answer.

"'For goodness sakes,' she laughs, 'then you

must be a relative of mine. But someone told me,' she goes on pestering, 'that you were planning to spend this summer in a villa of your own on the Italian lakes. What are you doing here?'

"'As I'd be done by,' I tell her.

"And then the horrid thing does a little shuffling dance in the road and says:

"'Well, then you're having a good time. You always did enjoy new sensations.'

"And I give the jackknife a fling out into the yard and put my face down on my knees and wonder if that is all there is in it for me. There's the jackknife out there."

The doctor took out his watch.

"You need sleep," he stated. "You go home and go to bed and I'll wait here till Marget comes."

Nancy demurred.

"I'm not a quitter," she answered stiffly.

"No, you are not. I've discovered that. But still you must go to bed. I'm looking for the crisis to-night. If we can pull her through that I think we have her safe. I am going to come back and stay and I want you in good form

because I'm going to send them all away but you. I can't have anyone around to excite her."

So that night they watched together beside Aunt Hiley Ann. They spoke to each other of definite things in low, serious tones.

"I have got to save her; she's a good woman," said the doctor from Salt Lick. "The people need her."

And Nancy, being a woman, answered, "I need her. She's been my friend."

Along about midnight, as the doctor had foreseen, the decisive crisis came. The fever which had been burning through the woman, dropped suddenly from high to below normal, accompanied by a collapse of exhausted nature. The doctor grew terse.

"We have got to work quickly now. The thing is to stimulate the heart action and keep up her temperature."

So through the thick of the night they two fought death, he issuing his short orders and she following them unquestioningly. But still the old mountain woman lay without rallying.

"No hope?"

"Not much."

They fought on.

"Have you ever seen anyone die?"

"No."

Nancy reached under the bedding.

"This flask of water is growing cold. Shall I fill it again?"

She crossed towards the fireplace where the iron kettle filled with water hung on its crane. He followed and halfway across the room took the flask out of her hand.

"You go down to the spring and get me a pail of water."

The spring was an eighth of a mile away along a rough trail.

"You're just sending me away. I'm not going. I'm not afraid to stay."

She took the bottle from him and refilled it from the kettle, using a gourd dipper and a funnel improvised out of stiff paper.

Later, in reward for their efforts, the sick woman's temperature began to rise. She wakened from her stupor, smiled wearily and then quickly dropped off into a natural, restful sleep.

Then Nancy began to tremble.

" There is nothing more to do now," said the doctor from Salt Lick.

He drew Nancy towards the hearth so that the light from the flames burning upon it fell directly on her face and stood with both hands laid upon her shoulders.

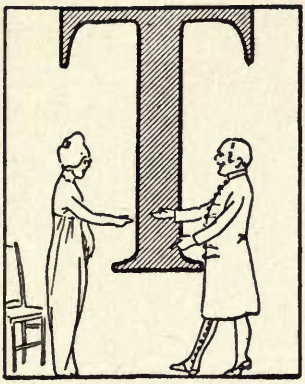
" You've got a smudge on your face," he commented.

Nancy tried to smile but she was too tired.

" She's safe if everything goes well. And you've been a brave girl. If it hadn't been for your care this past week I couldn't have done it. But don't do any more. They can nurse her now. I've got to save you for some more hard work. I'll call Marget as I ride by and send her here and then you go home to bed."

Still holding her by the shoulders, he stood for a minute studying her. Then he took out his handkerchief and flicked the smudge off her face.

" It's just some ashes."



THE Bishop dropped in to call on Mrs. Crubb.

"Have you heard from Nancy lately?" was almost his first remark. There was enough of eagerness in it to suggest that it was the object of his visit.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Crubb severely, "and I'd like to have you tell me more about this Schuyler woman. Are you sure she will take good care of Nancy?"

"Oh, Miss Schuyler is pure gold; she is one of God's saints."

"Well, my opinion is that God's saint is letting Nancy associate with people who are not proper for her to know. Take that Betsy Jane Skidmore person, for instance! I got worried for fear the saint hadn't good judgment and showed the letter to Mr. Williams. He used to know Miss Schuyler, and seems to think she is

all right — one of the finest women he ever knew. But that doesn't count for anything; you men all say that. Why, I dare say that when I'm gone you'll even be saying that I was one of the finest women you ever knew."

"Heaven forbid," smiled the Bishop with a shake of the head.

"Oh, I'm not such a bad sort," chuckled Mrs. Crubb with appreciation.

"The thing that worries Mr. Williams," she continued, "is this young minister she keeps writing about. And I don't wonder! 'It would be just like a silly, romantic-headed girl,' I told him, 'to fall in love with a penniless missionary and turn down a good chance like you. She's got it in her blood.' And probably God's saint would encourage her in it!"

"Oh, you people need not trouble yourselves about that. But the thing that worries me is having her ride around alone on that mule. Why, she might be thrown or — "

"Mule! If you had ever seen her drive an auto downhill the way I have, you'd never worry about a mere mule. Don't be so foolish, Hubert; I'll guarantee that she can manage the mule."

"But I wish when you write her you'd warn her against being too venturesome. I have spoken of it but perhaps if you were — "

"Me! She'd never mind me. I'm only her aunt, you know, while she is some kind of make-believe daughter of yours. There isn't a girl in the city that would not have jumped at what I planned out for her, but I couldn't make her heed me. I hand it over to you now; perhaps you'll have better success."

The Bishop was immediately on the defensive.

"Nancy is a thoroughly dutiful, biddable girl. Only I wish she would be a little more cautious about the way she rides around," he allowed, rising to take leave and at the same time feeling in his pocket to make sure that Mrs. Crubb had returned his last letter.

It ran:

Dear Bishop,

It is no use trying; I can't make myself into a missionary. After I had Aunt Hiley Ann off my conscience I slept and slept. I would wake, drink a glass of milk and then sleep some more; until early the second morning I opened my eyes, suddenly wide awake. I felt newly made and more than that; I wanted a good

time. It seemed as though there was a circus in town and I had no admission ticket. I knew that somewhere out in the crowded places of the world there were people just confessedly enjoying themselves; that there were, so to speak, the flap of flags, the blare of trumpets, the calls of the lemonade man, the jolly clown and the girl in tinsel riding horseback and throwing kisses to the crowd. At the thought of the girl I could stand Swaggerty no longer but mounted Wings and fled out of the valley and up the mountain-side. I think I had a vague notion that I might be able to find the tentful of happy people and at least get down on my knees and peek under the canvas at them. I could have wept at the picture of Nancy kneeling out alone in the mud and the peanut shucks.

But morning was lovely on the mountain-top. It was wide and free like a great adventure; so I swung along taking my chance on strange trails and trusting to find my way home again. By mid-morning I was following a bridle path at the top of the ridge into a pocket lying so high that the headlands sloping down to it seemed only like little hills. The good soil had been mostly washed out of it. It lay ribbed with bleached hummocks of rocks so sharp that you could not walk on their backbones. Among these stood a settlement of four log houses. Scattered here and there wherever was a foothold of good soil, grew a few stools of corn. Compared with this place Swaggerty is a

flourishing city. Swaggerty is rising in my esteem.

Before one of the cabins I slipped down out of my saddle. A mountain woman, Mittie Jeems, came out to tie my mule. After a parley of greetings I went to visit the other houses. As soon as a stranger was sighted, every woman, it seems, had started at a trot to prepare a dinner. At one place I found a meal waiting me set out on the table with one whole plate, two half plates and a tin tomato can. But I had promised to dine with Mittie Jeems.

She, in the meantime, had made the most of this opportunity to trim up her house and family. I found her flock of children with their faces freshly washed and their hair tied with strips of calico. As for the house! In it stood a table covered with an old sheet on which had been laid in state, surrounded with three postcards, the family hatchet. The eternal feminine longing for nicknacks!

If I could not dine with the folks of all four houses, they at least could gather round Mittie's door and watch me eat. It is disconcerting to have people stand by with interest and watch you chew, but I am growing used to it. And, then, that day we were all friends. They had, it seems, heard of me and some of them had seen me on the Fourth. Mittie said that she was "setting under a bush and my man came up to me and said, 'Come here, Mittie, and jest hear this girl talk. Law, ain't she the talkin'est thing!'" — which was intended

for a compliment. One rheumatic old fellow who moves with difficulty confided to me that he had followed me round all day to listen to what I said, and at leaving had told Aunt Hiley Ann that he was coming back again to Swaggerty because he'd "just natcherly got to hear that girl talk some more."

The entire place dropped work and gave itself up to a gala day. The children took turns riding Wings. Then I taught them some games: "London Bridge" and "A Trisket, a Trasket, a Green and Yellow Basket." We had such genuine fun that their elders wanted to join in; so it was not long before the entire citizen body of the hamlet was holding hands and circling round on the village common. When we were all tired I told them stories, with the children gathered up around my knees and their parents standing back in a wondering circle.

When we left they all clustered round Wings and me, full of kindly helpfulness to get us started.

One old woman, as she buckled the stirrup strap, said, "People must remember that we're just folks; but we're always glad to have 'em come up and see us."

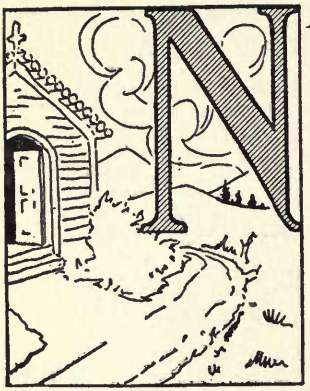
As Mittie handed up my whip she said, "We've had a plumb pretty day. We'll all be talkin' and braggin' about it. There's poor folks, and folks that has; but I've noticed that them that has is the grippin'est. We was born poor and we s'pect to die poor and all we can get out of the world is satisfaction."

As I drew rein at the edge of the pocket to look back, I saw them standing there still, waving to me.

You ask me to tell you how I should like to have you find my old friend David for me. Please don't. I have costumed him for such a variety of roles since my childhood that I should not feel acquainted with him if he were to take substance and insist on looking always the same. You are doing nicely as a substitute. And please, dear Bishop, make Aunt Crubb understand that I meant every word in the letter I sent her. I asked her to try to forgive me, for I am truly sorry at the end of all her generosity to disappoint her in just the way my mother did. Aunt Crubb was so disgusted with mother that she would never talk with me about her; but I have a notion that David was the desirable party Aunt had selected for her. Tell her "we're just folks," all of us, and that "all we can get out of the world is satisfaction." If I had taken Mr. Williams without caring, whatever satisfaction I could get out of an Italian villa would be stolen. I would rather pick up what of it I can here in Swaggerty by honest effort.

Nancy Lynn.

August 15.



NANCY'S next letter set the Bishop worrying from a different angle.

"I don't like the first part of this letter," he muttered. "It is sweet and womanly but what I want is to keep her just a girl as long as I can. Dear, dear! Possibly Mrs. Crubb is right; perhaps it was a mistake to send her off where she is thrown so much on herself.

"Anyway," he concluded, "I am glad there is a good doctor at hand. I think I shall have to drop him a note and ask him to keep an eye on her."

Then he reread:

Dear Bishop,

I do believe you are worrying about me. You warn me against riding off alone and I think I detect an unbishoply desire to go out and fight my David. My coat-of-arms is now a bishop rampant in an azure field.

The magic of life here is that it strips from one all that is trivial, like the foolish little leaves the trees have done with and shed. That gives the big things space in which to be. My love for just a few of you out there I count the big things of life. The thought that off alone in the world there is someone facing the weight of each day bravely silent, just as I am trying to face each day bravely here, is more precious to me now than any touch of hands or lips. One can do without those; I have learned to. But I don't think I could ever again live without the silent, steadying love which keeps a girl like me all day joyfully at unpleasant tasks and sends her singing to bed at night because —

Nonsense! What I meant to say was that Saturday I went with Aunt Hiley Ann, Uncle Lemmie and some of their kin to an all-day preaching. We drove up the creek bottom in a buckboard filled with straight-backed, splint chairs, then turned at an angle; and by digging their hoofs in, the mules succeeded in dragging us through what looked like the washout of a spring freshet. To me that pair of mules was accomplishing an astounding feat, but this aspect of the situation did not appeal to Aunt Hiley Ann. She leaned back in her splint chair, dipping snuff and gazing round on her buckboard of kinfolk with an automobile expression of pleased proprietorship.

When the mules scrambled up with us over the top of the ridge, there, facing a dip of open ground, yet

backing into the trees that rose behind it, stood a little plank meetinghouse, unadorned and looking like one of the sanctified, humble poor. It was a lonesome little structure. Just then, however, it wore an expression of restrained and pious festivity. Four or five buckboards flanked it; horses and mules stood hitched about, with their saddles empty and their harness hanging looped; from within it came a droning sound, for preaching had already begun. Inside it was bare, unpainted and time-stained. The men, grizzled and scraggy, sat on one side; on the other the women, ranging all the way from soft girlhood to the drooping chin and cheek muscles of old age. A wood stove in a shallow, tray-like box, occupied the center of the floor. High up against either wall, perched there on wooden brackets, stood a chimney-less kerosene lamp of the size known as bedroom lamps, the wall about each smoked in a fan-shape to a rich ebony. Seated in front, behind a rail not unlike an elevated foot-bench, were eight solemn, opinionated, ignorant exhorters, who snorted, wheezed, puffed and agonized in turn. Before them on the railing stood a tin bucket of water and a gourd towards which flowed steadily a little line from the congregation.

Aunt Hiley Ann went click-clacking in her brogans up to a seat on the far, holy side of the wood stove. I followed, tiptoeing reverently.

Soon we were all swaying on our benches and singing

through our noses with a melancholy lilt and sob of the voice:

"Conceived in sin (O wretched state!)
Before we draw our breath,
The first young pulse begins to beat
Iniquity and death —"

One woman suddenly gave forth a piercing shriek that loosened her back hair; she leaped into the air off both feet and clapped her hands together high above her head. For a full minute she kept up a shriek and a leap, a shriek and a leap, like a good working engine; until, quite as suddenly, she sat down to receive the congratulations of her friends.

My interest in this performance was so genuine and unfeigned that the youngest exhorter, a really brainy, good-looking, lithely graceful young fellow, thought that I, too, hung on the verge of "an experience of grace." Later, when we went out on the grounds to eat dinner and he joined the circle of Aunt Hiley Ann's kinfolk, I felt that my soul was being stalked like game.

When for the time being we laid aside religion like a cloak and the all-day preaching settled down to its dinner, corn pones, fried chicken, four-story apple pies, strewed the ground like autumn leaves; and the kin belonging to the different connections were gathered up as though in windswept circles around different

centers of bounty. But such is mountaineer hospitality that the stranger in their midst is provided with food from every basket. One could not offend by refusing their tentatively offered gifts. Rather the stomach ache than hurt one of their simple, generous hearts! So first came my bounden duty to Aunt Hiley Ann. I took that sitting on a rock near her kin. Then they began to levy on all the other baskets on the grounds to satisfy what they must have considered an all-consuming appetite. I stood with my back against a pine tree and bravely found room for choice bits of chicken, slices of boiled ham and hunks of corn bread. The young exhorter stood by and watched me with a steadily growing interest and respect. I was struggling with a great, juice-soaked section of dried-apple pie, a big, limp triangle which gave in the middle when you grasped it in both hands by the sides, and when you braced its center with the palm of your hand, sprinkled juice down on you from its edges. I had been considering its engineering possibilities and had concluded the only way was to take it boldly like a dive into deep water, when I felt someone's eyes fastened compellingly on me; and looking across the heads of the seated people, I saw the doctor from Salt Lick leaning against his horse, grinning with silent mirth. A sudden anger burned up through me. He recognized this but it only amused him the more. Away fled my former consideration for the people. I gave that piece of pie a level

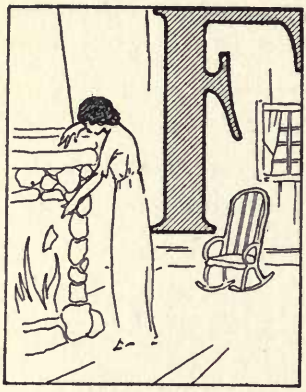
fling which sent it skimming into the pawpaw bushes. Then my sense of humor came to the rescue. My fingers were sticky with apple juice and I had lost my handkerchief. There was nothing to do except put them in my mouth like a schoolgirl, but he crossed through the people and considerately offered me the use of his handkerchief.

When we climbed into our buckboard and started home, we discovered the young mountain preacher riding alongside. Aunt Hiley Ann's automobile face was transported to aeroplane pride, for this was a great distinction. With Alexander MacDonald, I now have two men holding flirtations with my soul.

Write me whenever you can, friend o' mine. On days when the mail is brought into our settlement I go out to the road with my throat tickling and a hollow ache in my chest. I come up close beside the carrier's horse and follow the handwriting on the envelopes that he shuffles, so I know, even before he hands them down to me, what letters have not come. Perhaps there is one I have greatly hoped to get, and my heart whispers up to me that this time it has come. Yours are always welcome.

Loyally,
Nancy.

September 4.



FOR some time back Alec MacDonald had been prophesying the visit of a sister in whom Nancy was to find a "Soul Companion." Nancy thought probably she would like her. She thought it, however, without much enthusiasm, because she and Miss Schuyler were too busy to think of much aside from Swaggerty and its needs.

Then he sent word that she had come!

"Do you catch the huzzahs ringing through it?" suggested Nancy as she read the note over Miss Schuyler's shoulder.

Swaggerty, so he planned, was to hold an all-day picnic for her in a cave on one of the mountain-sides. "Knowing how busy you two are," he wrote, "I have asked her to make a cake, some sandwiches and some deviled eggs for the general dinner."

They spread the news and the settlement was delighted. It was a busy season but they finally arranged for Jock, a lean youth with the hookworm, to ride Wings over for her and walk back himself.

It was dusk when the Soul Companion arrived. They had been watching and ran out to the road to meet her. Through the twilight they spied on Wings' back a dump, squat vision under a big hat trimmed with a collection of artificial flowers. Otherwise she was all in white, even to her shoes.

Nancy grasped Miss Schuyler's arm.

"Spy the shoes," she whispered.

Miss Schuyler was more dignified but none the less concerned.

"I do hope she has brought others to wear to the cave. I suggested what she had better wear."

Meanwhile Miss Schuyler had introduced herself and the affinity whined something from Wings' back. She permitted Jock, the youth with hookworm, to lift her down bodily, and followed them inside.

With a stranger beside her, Nancy seemed to

look about upon the little cabin with a clearer focus.

"Isn't this a beautiful little nest?" she asked lovingly.

Blouzabella — that was not her name but by that time Nancy had presented her with it — merely remarked by way of reply:

"Did you notice how interested Jock was in everything I said?"

They had on their pantry shelf a can of lobster and a can of oysters. The oysters they had planned to offer up in the form of a stew.

"I propose," threatened Nancy, when they had a minute alone, "that we go right out on the wood-pile and eat them up."

"Your Blouzabella," stated Miss Schuyler, "is the kind that has never had any attraction for men and feels, as the years come along to her, that her last feeble grip on them is slipping. She takes no interest in women and is too selfish to pretend any."

"And she acts as though this were a hotel and we were the dining room girls," added Nancy. "If she gives me a tip I promise to put it in the collection."

Miss Schuyler relented and served the oysters. One cannot comprehend the magnitude of this generosity until he has lived forty-five miles from the railroad. After Blouzabella had them nearly eaten, she announced, sotto voce, that she had changed her mind and did not care to go to the cave after all.

Miss Schuyler grew stern.

"You will have to," she said. "You cannot disappoint the people."

When they had got Nancy's soul-mate to bed, they sat down and looked into each other's eyes. A wrathful missionary is a very human thing. Miss Schuyler declared she would make Blouzabella work, and Nancy, remembering "how interested Jock was in everything I said," vowed as soon as Blouzabella got her eyes fastened on a man to swoop down like an eagle and carry him off.

The next morning she kept breakfast waiting an hour and then she appeared in white, somewhat soiled by yesterday's trip on Wings, with a pompadour as big as a bolster.

They had been so busy papering Aunt Hiley Ann's cabin with old newspapers that they had

worked on until "lightin' time," counting on Blouzabella's offerings for part of the picnic dinner. At breakfast they discovered that she had not brought a thing. Meanwhile, Swaggerty, being early risers, had been ready and waiting none too patiently to start for some three hours.

Miss Schuyler, true to her word, set her to making sandwiches. Then, when they got out into the road and Blouzabella inquired if there was not something she could help carry, in that tone that implies of course there is not, the quiet missionary handed her a lantern with a tendency to drip kerosene.

They left the cabin with eight in the party but by the time they reached the mountain there were forty. First Marget and her brood joined. Then they came along to the gully that led up to Betsy Jane Skidmore's and found her sitting along by the road edge. Betsy Jane had not planned to go but the sight of them on their way proved too great a temptation. She rose to her feet and did some effective shouting up the gorge in regard to her change of plans. They next came to some men laying pump-logs down

the slope, who had not heard the news of the picnic, so all stopped and explained where they were going. The men laying pump-logs concluded to join in. There was a man by the roadside hewing out runners for a sled, but he decided that he might as well go along too. So the crowd grew.

All along the way the men were speechless at Blouzabella's whiteness, but when she began to pick her way across the soggy creek-bottom, the humor of it came to them.

"What do you think of her gyarments?" Nancy overheard one man remark.

"I suppose we'll have to take her in," suggested a man tentatively to another at the mouth of the cave.

The throat of the cave was not only covered with slime, but there were places where one had to get down on one's knees and crawl.

"I'd hate to get her clo'es muddied," drawled the other.

Its entrance was large, like a room; but soon came a little arch not unlike the door of a dog kennel. Here one had to creep for some distance. By the time the last ray of daylight was

left behind it was just a big cleft deep in the earth, wide and high above but narrow and rough round one's feet, which led up hill and down in the dark. Far in one came up against a smooth, perpendicular wall like a closed door, up whose face one must somehow mount. Then the same cleft went on at a higher level. They carried torches of red cedar, their flames lighting up the white crystal walls. A film of water trickled over them in places, glistening; and pendants like chandeliers hung overhead.

It had been difficult to mount that smooth, upright rock; but dropping down it was even harder. Two of the men discovered places to brace their backs against the side walls of the cave and so were able to set their feet against the face of the rock. Down these Nancy walked as down a flight of stairs. No trained society man could have found gentler ways of showing her consideration than these rude mountaineers.

"And out there at the mouth of the cave sits Blouzabella sniffing down on Swaggerty Valley," thought Nancy in a passion of protest.

She was still voicing this sentiment when she returned home. Miss Schuyler had preceded

her; Blouzabella had departed on Wings and they once more had the little house to themselves.

" And I shall have to spend the next three days wandering around among the cabins praising Mr. MacDonald so as to make sure her unpopularity does not injure his influence. And by that time," cried Nancy in mock despair, " they will be ' plumb sure ' I've fixed my love on him."

" Swaggerty has satisfied you, hasn't it, dear? There is no other place you'd rather be just now? "

" China."

Miss Schuyler smiled.

" No, seriously."

" Seriously," returned Nancy cheerfully.

They ate their simple supper. Then Nancy discovered a package of mail that had been left for them during the morning. She tossed it on the table between them and began sorting it.

" You have a letter from the Bishop," she commented handing Miss Schuyler a fat envelope.

Miss Schuyler slit the envelope with a hairpin and carefully readjusted the pin in place. Then she began perusing her letter, reading discon-

nected phrases aloud after a habit she had formed during lonely years as a mission worker.

"May arrange for you to come north for a few months — lecture about among churches — such a change would do you good — thank you — "

These snatches of words were from her Bishop, so Nancy stood listening to them. She and Miss Schuyler shared a common life together.

The reader turned a page and went on murmuring, "Knew you would be interested — one of the highest honors conferrable — has been transferred from China — considerable personal danger — intrigues — "

"Some missionary?"

"No; a friend of the Bishop's in the consular service."

Miss Schuyler laid down the sheet and picked up from the table a letter that had been enclosed with it. The heavy, round handwriting that covered the paper was as familiar to Nancy Lynn as though it had been John Carter's face.

"Been transferred from China — one of the highest honors conferrable — considerable personal danger — " the words ran through Nancy's

brain, and yet she asked no question. When she found herself spelling out the sheet from across the room, she shuddered and dropped her eyes. For a strange, new crisis had come to Nancy. Those Puritan relatives that had brought her up, those birds of drab wing at whom the mirth-loving Nancy Lynn had mocked, at last claimed her as one of their own. Their blood ran in her veins and hers began now to beat to the measures of their pulses. Nancy Lynn knew that even though she lived in the house with one who could inform her, no questions concerning John Carter would ever pass her lips. It would only be taking down the barriers she had been so long in rearing and she would have to begin the long struggle over. Then — here the Puritan in her was strong — she had given the Crusty Old Person her promise that once for all she was done with John Carter.

Miss Schuyler was long — cruelly long — in reading the letter but at last she laid it down on the table between them. Nancy picked up her own mail and attempted to lose herself in it; but whenever she turned her head — which was repeatedly — that sheet with its bold, firm

script struck her like a blinding flash of white light from an electric wire. She winced physically.

The Puritan in Nancy was still only a little naked, fledgeling bird. It had not yet grown strong in fortitude. She felt passionately that it was not possible for her to live in the same house with that letter. With a sudden impulse for self preservation she laid her hand down over it, crumpling it up into her palm.

"You don't want that any more," she said with a piteous little attempt at nonchalance, and crossing to the hearth, dropped the paper on the embers. She turned her back so as not to see it burn.

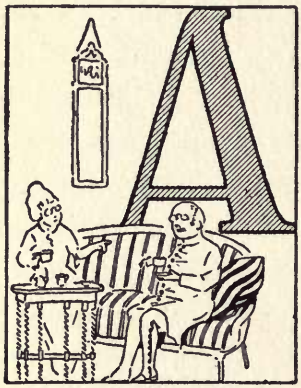
"Uh?" murmured Miss Schuyler without looking up.

That night Nancy Lynn, chill of body, lay awake and gazed wide-eyed into the dark. Transferred from China. Gone. Gone where? It was so like death. She remembered how when a little child she had been told that her father and her mother were "gone."

At length she fell asleep and dreamed that she was again a lonely little child without com-

panionship, swinging on Cousin Sarah Sperry's gate and watching down the road for David to come for her.

The next morning when she knelt on the fire-stone to brush up the hearth she found among the ashes a charred scrap of paper on which John Carter's hand had written — " Tibet."



AND so you have planned for Miss Schuyler to come out on a three months' leave and for Nancy to stay in there as her substitute!" exclaimed Mrs. Crubb.

"No, I can't say that I planned it. They planned it between them. But after looking at the matter from all sides, I have agreed to it."

"You may call it safe to leave a young girl all alone back in that nest of moonshiners, but I consider it distinctly imprudent. *All alone,* remember! Suppose she should be taken sick!"

"There is a good doctor within reach. You forget, Mrs. Crubb, that we have a number of women and girls working that way through the mountain regions."

Mrs. Crubb sniffed contemptuously.

"Yes; lean souls with no thought except to work out their road-tax to Heaven."

"Noble women," corrected the Bishop.

"But Nancy isn't a noble woman. That is just where the danger lies. She's all fire and spirit and she's beautiful — beautiful! Perhaps you have never noticed it, but she is. And there is something about her — I don't know what — but there is certainly something about that girl that turns people's heads. Why, my good man, she has yours turned clean around. That is the thing that makes it so unsafe for her. I tell you that to leave that kind of a girl in there unprotected is nothing more nor less than tempting — not Providence — it's tempting the devil himself."

The world, including the Bishop, was in the habit of accepting extremes from the hands of Mrs. Crubb; but now his spirit, which was quiescent rather than acquiescent in the presence of his hardy old friend, straightened its shoulders.

"You refer to her personal safety. Certainly I did not give my consent for her to stay in there during Miss Schuyler's absence until I had carefully investigated that. She wants to do it and the doctor assures me that she is in no slightest personal danger. Miss Schuyler writes that Nancy

is absolutely safe in Swaggerty; that she holds the whole valley in the hollow of her hand; that there is not a man in it who would not fight to protect her. Nancy herself says, 'They regard me as a kind of civic possession. When we are alone they treat me like a pampered child. Before the neighboring settlements they wear me proudly on their front like a filigree breast-pin.'"

"I can't see why she should want to stay."

"She writes that it is because she has seen the light on the morning hills."

"Humph! If you think this whim of hers to play missionary-substitute is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, you are mistaken. She's just got a hankering to try it. I discovered while I had her here that she is a regular tea-taster of life. Why, it was all I could do to keep her from talking to the butler. No, my dear sir, the idea of staying appeals to her sporting blood. She's starting out to do it just as most people start to a ball game."

The Bishop read from a letter he took out of his pocket:

"'I want to fill in my days with work, work, work, until at night I am so tired I slip into bed, turn over with my face in my arms and fall asleep without a thought.' That does not sound much like play."

"No," agreed Mrs. Crubb. Then she burst forth vehemently, "And I suppose you wrote her to put on the whole armor and work herself to death."

The Bishop looked conscious.

"I did quote — "

"Of course you quoted it! Don't I know! But, my good friend, if you think the whole armor was built to fit a girl like my niece, you're wrong. Why, she's wearing a twenty dollar corset this minute — and the whole armor wasn't designed on those lines. Nancy Lynn is saturated with the love of luxury, mockery, originality; that's why she is so refreshing; that's why I like the girl. This whim won't last. I'd be willing to wager that right now she is sitting out somewhere in the sun with the helmet cocked down over one eye, beating a tattoo on the front of the breastplate and singing college songs."

Mrs. Crubb's voice caught impatiently.

"And here I've been planning that it was getting time for her to come home. I had even got to the point of saying that if nothing but that young minister in there would suit her, to bring him along."

"It seems to me your head is turned, too," smiled the Bishop.

"No, it isn't," dissented Mrs. Crubb. "But sometimes I think she has given it a bit of a twist."

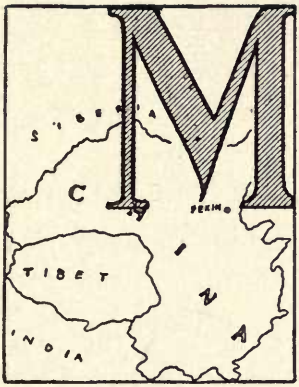
Now that she had been disarmed, Mrs. Crubb's voice took on a note of personal grievance.

"She's taken up solid reading. She wrote me to send her all the books, magazines, and newspapers I could find that contained anything about Tibet. Tibet! Think of a girl as pretty as Nancy Lynn taking to solid reading!"

"Tibet? That's a strange subject to choose; but I think it is a good idea for her to do some reading. It will keep her from being lonesome."

The Bishop took a memorandum book out of his pocket and wrote in it:

"Nancy — Tibet."



RS. CRUBB was mistaken. Nancy was not sitting out in the sunshine humming popular airs. Rather, when the responsibility she had assumed actually fell on her shoulders, she was so overpowered by it that the temptation was just to curl up her fingers in her lap and look down at them helplessly.

But she could not sit and curl her fingers. Only the very rich or the very poor can do that. What Nancy had pledged herself to was not a life of idleness. Day varied from day, but the duties of one of them, for example, ran thus: In the morning she slipped out of bed without a murmur at half past five; did the housework; entertained a Primitive Baptist minister who called "to have some Christian conversations"; rushed down at Uncle Lemmie's earnest solicitation just in time to prevent Aunt Hiley Ann from eating

beans, which didn't agree with her; walked two miles down the valley to make a missionary call; and climbed the gully on the way home to do up Betsy Jane Skidmore's chest in mustard. The waning of that afternoon was spent in making out mission reports. Nancy sighed laboriously over these.

"It aways makes my back itch to add."

On one of these busy mornings Nancy was resting along the way three miles down the road when the carrier came riding up the valley with the mail.

"Howdy," called up Nancy in local parlance.

"Howdy," responded the man, reining in his mule. "Will you have your mail here, Miss Nancy, or shall I carry it along for you?"

"What have I?" she asked curiously, coming up close to the mule's side.

"Oh, right smart," he answered, drawing out of his saddlebags her letters and a large package.

"I'll take them here," decided Nancy. "Somebody will be going along my way and carry them for me."

"'Bye," she called after the man.

"'Bye," he answered.

Nancy seated herself along the highway and undid her package. It contained the books on Tibet sent in by the Bishop. She looked at their titles and then, without choosing among them, picked up the volume that lay uppermost on her lap and began to read. There was no need to choose, for she knew that she would devour every word of every book. The sun swung in an arch through the sky towards its afternoon time of shadows, but Nancy took no heed of the hours. She was no longer among the green mountains of Tennessee with their lines patted round and smooth by God's hand as little children pat their sand hills. She was a hemisphere away where the crowded, unspeakable mountains of Tibet rear themselves out of infinite abysses. With heart and brain functioning together — as is the way with women — Nancy gathered bits here and there from the pages and fitted these together. She caught the glint of sunlight on lofty, perpetual snows. She peered down over mountain precipices into purple voids where no foot of man could penetrate. On her shoulders she felt flaying winds that focus in the high passes and spread out again on the plateaus into sudden, gusty

storms that hurl one from one's feet. And because the man she loved was there, it seemed to her of all lands the most desirable. She pictured herself on its high, waste moors where stolid, credulous little folk shift their black tents; in the cow-herders' villages of three or four mud hovels built on the lip of some tremendous precipice. She wandered the stone-built towns where the fanatical priesthood has collected the sparse wealth of the country. She followed beside the traders driving down to India and China their flocks of tiny sheep, each bearing its little sack of borax or wool or gold dust. The Crusty Old Person might pledge the lips of Nancy Lynn to silence but not Heaven itself could keep the loyal heart of her from following him whom she loved.

Among the letters which lay unread in Nancy's lap was one addressed in the Bishop's fine, dismembered, clerical hand. It was high noon before she turned from the printed pages long enough to open this. She did so dutifully but, it must be conceded, with just a shade of impatience. Forgive her the disloyalty. She was a far traveler that day. The Bishop commended her resolution to do some sound reading and

trusted that she would find her chosen subject interesting. Then, in order that she might get a better grasp of it, he painstakingly outlined for her the actual, existing political situation of Tibet. In doing so, he explained, he was trusting her with certain unpublished, inside information with which he had recently been favored, as he thought she would find these facts helpful and illuminating. Nancy did find them illuminating. It was at this point that she grasped the Bishop's letter with both hands.

Over the vast, isolated country of Tibet, China exercises suzerainty. However much China may be torn by internal strife, the warring factions recognize that it must still keep its hand heavy upon Tibet, because here is a long monopolized market for its merchandise. But other powers have sniffed in it the scent of a new bone. China is suspicious of the interest of Russia, which hangs like a vague black shape along the border of Tibet. She resents the intrusions of the English. So up into that remote, hidden country China has sent a little company of men so to shape affairs for her that when the crisis comes she will be ready to meet the clash of events.

These are two governors with their staffs, who supervise Tibetan military and foreign matters. And since the great arch-enemy of China is the slowly encroaching British, it is necessary for this band of workers to include someone who can interpret events from the occidental viewpoint. Therefore they have taken along with them a young American, a former under-secretary of the legation at Peking, who has severed his diplomatic connections and comes as a private citizen. He is a quiet, earnest, thorough man by the name of Carter, who has burst his chrysalis, as quiet, earnest, thorough young men sometimes do, and stands revealed to a small inner circle as a man with the wings of ability.

It was late in the afternoon when Reverend Alec MacDonald rode by and found Nancy still sitting by the roadside. When, in response to his greeting, she rose and came out into the highway, she staggered a little as though she were just emerging from a deep dream. Her face was pale from the long strain of concentrated reading, but her eyes were luminous.

The world does not realize to what an extent the spirit of motherhood in some of its secondary

forms is the prompting motive of its women. Nancy Lynn was rejoicing that she had made the sacrifice and given this man to the times. This was the radiance that shone out from her face.

"Why, what has happened!" exclaimed Alec MacDonald.

Nancy reached out her hand and stroked the horse's neck. One does not hurry in the telling of such news. An inward light — it was far more than a smile — trembled upward across her face from her lips.

"I have just been presented at court," she answered softly.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that I have just learned," she answered slowly, "that someone I once knew has a voice in the making of nations."

Alec MacDonald blanched.

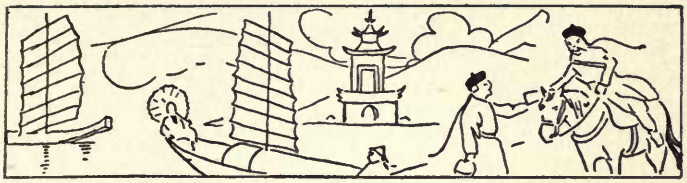
"Is it — someone — you care for?"

Nancy rubbed her hand along the satin of the horse's neck, smiling softly at the childishness of the phrase. Then she lifted her eyes and looked them full into his.

"It is someone I love."

Alec MacDonald gripped the pommel of his saddle until his knuckles turned white.

" Good-bye," he said, lifting his hat; and rode on.



Dear Doc,

Your letter deserved to have been answered some time back but you know yourself how such things go. Since hearing from you I have moved back into the interior. Am now in Tibet. For awhile at first this high altitude keeps the low-lander lying night after night wide awake in his bed. When a man strikes half a dozen such nights on a stretch out here in the east, it sets him thinking about home. How you big-brothered me when you were an upper classman and I was nothing but a heady young cub. The Lord knows why you did it.

Thanks for your congratulations. Same to you — for I hear that you are doing things in your Tennessee mountains. Some of us can't help feeling that you are hiding your light, for

you were the biggest man in the round-up. But you know best, of course.

I am here as an unofficial member of the staff of the Chinese governor at Shigatse. Picture your friend Carter living a life of imperial magnificence. My section of the palace is more like stage setting for light opera than a man's living quarters. I don't think that I should be much surprised if at any time a curtain should ring up and I found myself standing before an audience with the orchestra below working away for dear life.

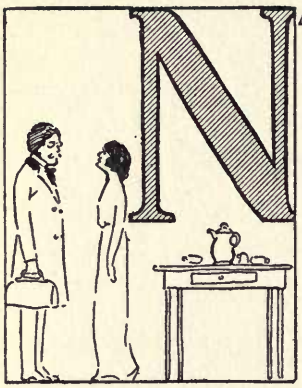
The only person that could really appreciate this place would be some nice, fresh-hearted American girl, the sort of girl the Lord makes only in the States, the kind that would be outwardly a bit prideful but inwardly amused by it. And if He were in a particularly gracious mood, He'd give her brown hair and blue eyes, for I'm dead sick of sleek little black heads eternally salaaming. The most mercenary American girl I ever met at least stood straight up on her feet. Take my word for it, Doc, and make the most of the blessings at hand. If by any far chance one of them should wander into Tibet, I

foresee that there are spells when, resolutions to the contrary, I'm hers for the taking.

But, joking aside, I don't know when I shall be able to set foot back there with you again. Sometime, I hope. Good luck to you.

Cordially,

John Carter.



NANCY saw the doctor from Salt Lick every day or so. Whenever he was called east into the mountains he rode there by the way of Swaggerty Valley. She knew when he was coming by a clatter of hoofs down the road, for he always rode at breakneck speed. He kept three horses and sometimes was scarcely off them for days, catching snatches of sleep in the saddle. When he was very hurried he stopped only long enough for a minute's talk from horseback. Other days he had time to sit on the doorstep awhile; and when he was very tired they went inside and made coffee. Then Nancy had the feeling of being at a party, he was so alive and companionable. There was something about this doctor from Salt Lick that converted her into a listener. As he told her from day to day the humorous experiences of his practice, she sat

looking at him with lips apart like a child's and eyes steady with wonder, for underneath his jesting she caught the same seriousness that she had found in all the outsiders that lived in here.

" They are all wrestling with the angel," she thought.

Shortly after the settlement was left to Nancy's care the doctor rode over to see how she was getting on as a missionary. He came prepared to scold her in case she had lost her nerve.

He found Swaggerty full of civic happenings. Aunt Hiley Ann had her brass kettle boiling over a wood fire beside the creek, doing some dyeing. It was such a good opportunity that the entire settlement had brought articles to be dipped and these hung about her over the heads of the bushes. There was another center of excitement down the road apiece where the Jeems family was holding a house-raising.

" Ten by twelve and there are only three in the family," cried Nancy palatially. Her enthusiasm was genuine.

" Then, too," she gossiped, " Old Man Devin has moved his cow from his east pasture lot to his lot at the west of the settlement. I have been in

here so long now that it requires concentration for me to realize that the President's trip is anywhere near as important as this journey of the Devin cow."

She raked the coals of the fireplace forward on the hearthstone into a hot bed of embers and set the kettle in them to boil. Then she rose from her knees and faced him.

"Two years ago, if anyone had told me that the land of my heart would be just a knot of smoky log houses with chimneys biasing up one gable end, that I'd get down on my knees to show the women how to scrub the floor, and snuggle and sing lullabies to babies dressed in unspeakable red calico, with my heart just breaking with pity, I should have called it a horrible dream and tried to pinch myself awake. Now I feel that I am beginning to discern the durable satisfactions of life."

"And if anyone had told me, back in medical school, what my practice was to be, I think I would have thrown it up and been a professional pitcher. Take the patient I have on my hands now over on Indian Back. That girl had the toothache, so her father took a hammer and a

shingle nail and knocked the tooth out. The folks over there consider the extraction an entire success, but I'm afraid the girl is going to die."

"How did you happen to settle in here?" she asked.

He explained simply how it had started from hunting trips; but as he realized the ignorance of the section, he could not escape the feeling of its need of his profession.

"If you stay in here long enough you won't be able to leave, either. But I am going to send you out for the holidays," he said, a note of seriousness coloring his voice.

"By what authority?"

"Oh, I have the authority; I've been told to take care of you."

She was still sitting at the table from which she had been serving him coffee. Nancy rested her elbows on it and slipped her chin into the cup made by the palms of her hands. She scanned him mockingly.

"Then you must be my David. Can it be possible that I am to find David in Swaggerty?"

"Who is he?"

Nancy related to him the little story of this

friend of her childhood, her face growing wistful as she talked. The doctor from Salt Lick appreciated as he watched her that this legendary person was woven more closely through the fibre of her thoughts than the girl herself realized. He rose and turned slightly from her.

"No; I don't think David is quite the role to suit me.

"Nevertheless," he added in his positive way, turning towards her again, "I have had orders to take care of you and so I am going to send you out for the holidays."

"Why?"

"Well, for one reason, it isn't fair for us people in here to take advantage of you. Such a thing might happen. You say that you are growing to like us and our mountains — you see, I've amalgamated; I am part of it now. That may be only because of your gift of adaptability. It may be just because you are shut in with us so far off from the rest of the world. We mustn't be unfair to you. Go back, little girl, and renew your standards of comparison and then come again and judge us. That is only being honest with you."

"But my affections are not matters of comparison."

"Nevertheless," he insisted, "I think you should go. For another reason, there is none of the Christmas spirit in here; and it would be too bad for a girl like you to lose that out of the year."

He went on to explain at length the nature of the Christmas they keep back in the mountain. He pictured to her how only ten years ago this whole belt of country was a hotbed of moonshining, with her own settlement as its focal point. Even in broad noonday the stranger who had to cross the county gave Swaggerty a wide berth, making a long detour of other roads rather than ride through this valley. The revenue officers came in squads of six or eight with some one of the Swaggerty folk captured and carried along as a protection against bullets fired down on them on a chance from the mountain-sides.

He told her how at holiday time the old moonshine spirit always broke out. They would bring in quantities of Christmas whiskey which they referred to metaphorically as "Old Corn." He told of such pranks as capturing folks and leav-

ing them tied all night to a tree on the mountain-top, of dragging people out of their beds and making them dance in the road while the " prankers " stood around in a circle and shot their " Christmas guns."

" Then that is all the more reason for me to stay and show them what a real Christmas is," insisted Nancy.

She rose and began moving about the room.

" I'd like to spend the holidays with the Bishop and Aunt Crubb. As Betsy Jane says, ' If I had my ruthers, I'd ruther.' "

She threw out both hands with that quick little gesture of hers.

" It seems wrong not to end the year in a blaze of candles and carols and Christmas greens; of white tissue paper and evening dresses and light-hearted people talking all at once. What I should like would be Aunt Crubb's beautiful, big house filled with my own kind of girls and men. Sometimes it's hard for me to be a steady, plodding example-for-good. But — "

Nancy smiled upon him the particular smile that meant that she was going to have her own way. She was the only person who ever dis-

obeyed him, which was one reason he liked her.

" But I'm not going."

To the Bishop she wrote, " Light a candle for me on Christmas Day and set it in your library. That will stand for Nancy."

Then she went among the people, scattering suggestions, until she had all Swaggerty agog talking plans for the approaching holidays.

IT is not often that dreams come true more wonderfully even than one visioned them; but this was so of Nancy's Christmas in Swaggerty.

As holiday time drew near she thought more and more wistfully of the swell of Christmas feeling that was rising like a glad tide over the world outside. A week before Christmas she wanted to ride over into the next valley; but they were already drinking and shooting on Possum Creek and Uncle Lemmie did not think it safe to let her go. The following day there came down from the settlement in the gap above them the sounds of shouting and shooting, proving that the holiday "Old Corn" had arrived there and the pranking begun. What could one girl do at the center of such a maelstrom!

If only we trust it, life always sends us what

we need. This is a truth to hold to. In her mail there chanced to be a magazine article describing how a New England town hung its Christmas greens on the outside instead of the inside of its dwellings as a means of radiating Christmas cheer. Something in the idea quickened Nancy's courage. Swaggerty, she determined, should be a radiating center, a luminous spot, which would show this drunken, roistering mountain country the true way to keep the festival of the Christ-child.

First she offered three prizes — fifty, forty and thirty cents! — for the houses within a five-mile limit whose exteriors were most attractively trimmed. Not only choice but necessity demanded that the decorations should be hung on the outside, for where a family of from six to twelve live in a one-room cabin, the Christmas "bush" must stand in the dooryard and the decorations be hung on the outer walls. Her plans grew. The meetinghouse was to be opened and warmed as a kind of clubhouse for the younger men with adventuring blood who were to take charge of mounting a Christmas tree.

With the abrupt, whole-hearted enthusiasm of

children Swaggerty started out to set the county an example in Christmas keeping. They had never before heard of such a thing as decorating their houses, but they went at it with the will to do. Each house was first flanked on the outside with green boughs and these hung with scraps of paper, bits of cloth, dead rabbits, tobacco signs, anything that came to hand, provided only it had color. Each house had its Christmas bush standing in the yard. This did not hold the family gifts — there were none — but just formed a kind of storm center in the whirlwind of decorations.

Betsy Jane Skidmore worked two days and two nights without taking off her clothes, to make up old newspapers into trimming for her house, snipping the whole night through by the light from her hearth. The art-child of her brain was a newspaper rose formed of three paper disks of decreasing size, notched around the edge and fastened flat one upon the other. These inspired such enthusiasm that they spread like a contagion.

She said, " While I set there working, I'd get so happy that I'd find myself a-mumblin' and

a-singin' and a-laughin' and a-shoutin' to myself."

An old woman came walking down the valley to "take Christmas" with her folks.

"Sakes!" she cried, "what's took Swaggerty?"

Aunt Hiley Ann replied with lofty unconcern, "Oh, we're just prettyin' up for Christmas."

The rumor of what they were doing spread through the county. A man riding through by the way of their road carried the news that all Swaggerty was trimmed up, adding with rustic humor that he "even met an old hog running down the road with a twig sticking out of each ear."

By this time not a soul in the settlement would have got drunk. They felt that they were setting the county an example.

So Christmas morning came and the sun looked down upon them out of a clear, crisp sky. None but a mountaineer mind could set a relative value on the decorations, so Nancy chose three old men to act as judges. By nine o'clock they started out on muleback for their round of inspection, wearing a pleasant touch of self-consciousness. In the meantime the younger men had gathered

at the " church-house " to hang the gifts. They had the walls wreathed and festooned with holly and a whole gleaming holly tree standing ready for its load of presents.

At noon Nancy selected two of the girls and three young fellows who might prove dangerous ringleaders and swept them in to Christmas dinner with her. It was canned corn beef; but never mind that. She did not dare let them go to their homes. She had to keep her hands on them all day. When the plum pudding Aunt Crubb sent was brought on, wreathed in holly, she supplied some of her guests with horns and the others, at her request, whistled lustily while it was cut. This shed a fascination over what they knew only as the commonplace business of eating. A stimulating sense of danger ran throughout the day. Would it be possible, Nancy wondered, to hold Swaggerty to its high standard through those empty, unsatisfying hours of early afternoon?

Just as her guests were scraping their saucers for the last drop of pudding sauce, outside rose suddenly a din and clamor. Apprehension gripped at her heart. They all rushed for the

door. Without adieus the three men guests broke past her for the road, for there before the house trooped a loose procession, shouting and chattering. It was Swaggerty marching down to meet the judges. Such a democratic throng it was; some afoot, some muleback; men, women, children; hunting dogs flanking the march with quick yaps of excitement; a cow that had got herded in, and a nervous, excited hen or two that had dodged in and was squawking forward in terror of being trodden underfoot. They passed on, leaving Nancy weak from the stress of fear turned suddenly to joy.

Three quarters of an hour passed before she heard the sound of their returning; shouts of triumph, the shrill notes of a mountain song; the punctuating blare of a tin horn. Then somewhere down the road broke in the ringing of a dinner bell. This caught from cabin to cabin for five miles up and down the valley.

Betsy Jane Skidmore said, "I was never so happy in all my life. I jes' wanted to yell but I thought everybody'd think I'd gone plumb crazy, so I choked and swallowed it down till I thought I'd bust my bosom. Then I heard the bells a-

ringin' and the Lord put it into my head to sing an old song my pap used to sing, 'The Heaven Bells is Ringin'.' And I said, 'Children, we ain't got no bell to ring but let's sing her.' So we sang her: 'Oh, the heaven bells is ringin'.' It just fitted the 'casion and before I knew it, I was flappin' my arms and shoutin'.

"When Uncle Lemmie come ridin' along with the flag, his face just shone as he will never face it to the world again. 'Children,' I said, 'just look at Uncle Lemmie's face.'

"'Oh, the heaven bells is ringin'!' When I heard that thar horn I said, 'That's Gabriel blarin' his trumpet. Seems like Swaggerty is just Heaven and he's blowin' his horn. Sure the Lord is in Swaggerty this day.' He was right here, walkin' up and down the road. I said, 'Children, why shouldn't He be here as well as anywhere else?'"

The procession came up a little knoll in the road to Nancy's house, the flag and the judges ahead, with the crowd following; men, women and children, dogs and chickens, with "Miss Lynn" — that was a cow named after her — in the center, joyously switching her tail.

The Christmas bush that night was a whole holly tree, the lighted candles glittering on its red berries and on the gifts sent in. Nancy could not reconcile herself to having it at any time but night; though Swaggerty warned her that with all the drinking and roistering going on in the mountains this would not be safe, because of the strangers who would ride into the settlement to view it. Her foolhardiness prevailed; though she did not realize how great a danger they accepted for her sake until she learned that every man in Swaggerty came to the Christmas bush with a loaded revolver. For miles and miles strangers came to keep Christmas night with them. Perhaps they guessed at those hidden revolvers; but she liked to believe that they, too, caught the clean joy. However that may be, from the entrance of the first visitor to the last sound of a departing hoof-beat, there was never a more orderly gathering than the one that crowded the festive little meetinghouse to its utmost.

Santa Claus was there on his first visit, in all the friendly joviality of his red suit and white beard. It was a part the settlement wit had

never seen played, but his clumsy antics met with uproarious enthusiasm. He held complete sway and beamed on the little children.

Santa Claus held sway until the time came to close with Christmas carols, the first carols that ever Swaggerty had sung upon a frosty Christmas night. The settlement had gathered at Nancy's cabin and practiced them for days back. They had been a strong bond to hold them to their standard. The strength of these venerable songs is in their objectiveness. Swaggerty Cove really saw the guiding star; it journeyed with the "three wise men from afar." If it was a trip by muleback over mountain roads, what matter so long as they brought the true gifts of the spirit to the new-born king. But the most deeply of all they loved:

> "Once in royal David's city
> Stood a lowly cattle shed,
> Where a mother laid her Baby
> In a manger for His bed."

To them it was no tradition dulled by repetition; it was fact. They knew out of their own experiences the insufficiency of such shelter.

They heard the rustle of the fodder and the slow munching of the cattle in the dark. They knew the pang and the joy of it. With tears rolling down their faces they sang:

"And His shelter was a stable,
And His cradle was a stall."

Betsy Jane Skidmore was right. The Lord that day did walk up and down the road in Swaggerty; and life after was always different to those who heard the sound of His garments as He passed.

Dear Bishop,

I guess the whole armor was too heavy for me. My poor little body is like a horse fagged into balkiness. I can't make it get up and move. I lie all day on a cot in front of the fireplace but the flames that leap up the chimney do not bring me dreams. I can't seem to care about them. This is Sunday morning and my people are singing in the "church-house" next door, Marget yelling her words chestily and Betsy Jane drawling three notes behind the others in her fervor and croaking in her throat. But I can't even be amused.

The Christmas gifts sent in to me still lie on my table in their tissue paper. I just have not got round to open them, because when I see them I shudder and turn away. All except the locket

with your picture in it that I asked for. I hold that closed in my hand. It makes you seem nearer me.

The doctor-man " stopped by " a week ago and found me sitting alone in my cabin in all the glory of my pink and violet gown, elbows on the table, chin in my palms, looking straight before me. But he wasn't amused at the incongruity of it as I had thought I should be when I dressed up. His eyes were stern from the first minute they rested on me. He asked me how long I had been sitting there and I said I didn't know. He declared this was no place for me; that he would come himself in the morning to drive me out to the railroad and send me back to the life to which I belong. Then, suddenly, though really I was feeling hollow and absent from myself, I began to laugh and talk foolishness. I insisted that I wouldn't go; that I was getting full swing of a sanctified vocabulary and if I could only get in three minutes' conversation with Saint Peter at the gate he would let me in on my phrases alone. He looked so stern that I remember getting frightened and laughing and asking him if he supposed the gate was a turnstile, for then I

didn't stand a chance. But he just turned on his heel without a word and the next thing in came Marget with orders from him to put me right to bed.

He has been very good; he has been over every day and sometimes his rides are so he can stop twice during the day; so you must not worry; and, then, I am much better. You would be surprised, for instance, how much strength I have in my hands. I can keep my fingers closed over your locket the whole day without once opening them.

My doctor is a great man, friend o' mine, and nobody knows about him. The love of a girl doesn't hinder his kind from being great. There are different kinds, I find. I have another friend who is going to be famous some day. I know he is a busy man but yet I couldn't help believing that at Christmas time he would —

I'm too tired to write any more; only, please, Bishop, ask Aunt Crubb if she will look over her Christmas mail again and see if she has not overlooked something for me; just a note or a card or even a newspaper. I asked her once and you please ask her to do it again.

I'm in good hands, don't worry; and when I get strong again I shall have nothing in my heart but my work.

Annie.

Jan. 2.

Dear Friend o' Mine,

Would you really have cared so much? Think of your not going into your library for three days because of the sight of a half-burned candle standing there. I am nearly myself again and am looking at the moon over my right shoulder.

Please tell Aunt Crubb I have that piece of mail. It is just a little parchment volume, hand-tooled, of glad, brave poems. I must not acknowledge it; but I put it among my Christmas gifts and they all looked so beautiful.

I have smiled over the consternation the book has caused in the settlement. Marget was here when I opened the package. "From the Heart" is the name of the book. That does not signify that they are love poems. It means only that each comes as a direct, glad impulse from some

brave heart. These are the ones he knew I would enjoy: I understand. But Marget is one of the few in Swaggerty who can read, and when she saw the title, her jaw fell under the weight of sundry conclusions which I have been unable to dispel. Later in the day when I crept down to Aunt Hiley Ann's cabin, I found the whole settlement there singing, as it were, a dirge with the refrain that I was going away to be married. I find myself the victim of what might be termed funeral obsequies. Saturday Aunt Hiley Ann kills six chickens and invites everybody in.

" I love the very ground you walk on," sniffles Uncle Lemmie, " and if we've got to lose you, we must cook for you."

Doctor looks perplexed and says I do not recuperate the way other people do but am just smiling myself back into health. I wrap up in a long coat and sit out in the sun looking about me on the singing land. When the afternoon turns to purple the valley fills up with shadows. Then I have a feeling that the smile sinks quietly down into the depths of me and that it will lie there and grow old-fashioned, the way Miss Schuyler's did. For there is style in the way

of smiling. Mine won't be chic when I come back.

Since I have been sick the people have treated me like a pampered child. Only a few minutes ago Marget came in with a bit of hard pink candy. She is the grand lady of the section and had bartered a half dozen eggs for some sweets for herself and her brood of seven.

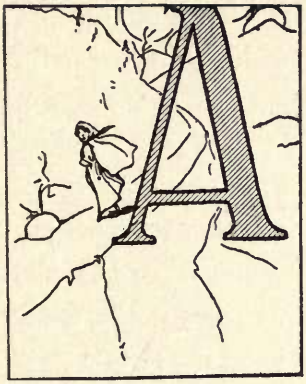
"But I couldn't enjoy it without I saved you a piece," she said, thrusting her head in the door. "I counted seven of 'em but it seemed like I had eight."

So don't again dread the sight of the half-burned candle, but light it and say, "That's Nancy; a foolish little taper moulded for worldly uses but trying to shine in a dark corner."

From the Heart,

Nancy.

January 25.



SUNDAY morning came, when the doctor gave his permission for Nancy to go back to the little "church-house." It was good to stand again between the rude walls, the mountain folk sitting before her, their faces lifted in rows, each lighted from within by a smile. She was a girl who talked little about herself; but she pictured for them something of her lonely, shifted childhood; how she had grown to love them in here; how this was the first place that had ever held for her a feeling of home. Her three months were over; Miss Schuyler was not to come back and the Board had said that Nancy Lynn might contract for the coming year. She told them honestly how some woman fitted to help them might be sent in, while now it was they who were teaching her.

Betsy Jane Skidmore leaped to her feet, ten-

derly defiant, crying, " I nigger dare 'em to take you away."

They all huddled about in a close circle, their eyes caressing her and their lips trembling with feeling. Aunt Hiley Ann held both her hands in a hard grip.

" We'd rather go on taking care of you."

So Nancy Lynn stayed.

After the year makes the turn at Christmas, the suffering in the mountains is from the cold. It is not the snow that harasses, but the frosts and the biting winds. They keep the flames roaring in the fireplaces but these warm only a small circle of the dead cold that lies in the houses. Most of the cabins have no windows, so it is necessary to leave the door open all winter to let in the light. It was bleak and cold in the mornings when at five o'clock Nancy crept out of bed. She did her morning housework, tiptilting on her toes to keep the blood in them, constantly blowing on her fingers to keep them warm. But her discomfiture was nothing compared with that of the women and children who went up before the break of dawn to pull fodder or break new ground in the steep-sloping fields. Many of

them walked barefooted through the frost. When Nancy looked out of her windows in the morning dark, high up in the clearings the bonfires at which they warmed themselves gleamed like low-hung stars.

So the winter wore on.

One afternoon in the early dusk the doctor, who had stopped in passing, had risen to take leave.

"You never told me whether or not you like my book," he suggested, pausing by the table.

"What book?"

He lifted a volume just high enough to slant its title towards her.

She read, "'From the Heart.'

"Did you send me that book?"

"Yes. I expected you to go for the holidays, you remember, and I planned it so you would get it at Christmas-time."

Nancy stood silent, looking down at the volume, which had come to her readdressed in Mrs. Crubb's handwriting.

"Didn't you like it?" begged the doctor. "I thought it would appeal to you."

"Yes; I did. It cured me. That was what

I was thinking about the days I sat out in the sun getting well."

"I felt sure it would please you — dear," he added tentatively.

But Nancy Lynn did not hear him.

She threw a long coat around her and walked down the path with him to where his horse was tied. Here she delayed his leave-taking. She felt a sudden dread of being left alone. When finally he had mounted, she laid her fingers lightly over his bridle-hand. Her face looked up at him through the dusk like a flower.

"If a girl told a man, straight-out, that she jilted him because someone else could give her silk stockings to wear, she needn't expect to hear from him, need she?"

"Hardly."

"Of course not; she just mustn't expect it."

The doctor from Salt Lick smiled down at Nancy's little feet clad against the cold in home-knit woolen stockings and heavy shoes.

"Would you like silk stockings?"

"No, I loathe them! I loathe silk stockings!"

There was nothing melodramatic about Nancy Lynn. Her strain of Puritan blood, which was

beginning to assert itself, would not have permitted her to indulge in heroics. After he had gone, she fastened the long coat about her and went on down the trail in the dusk, seeking human companionship. The child she found strayed and crying in the dusk, she gathered up and quieted in her arms.

"No, I can't come in," she called, setting the little one on its own threshold.

She untangled a hunting dog that had got knotted up in its leash. So she worked her way a mile down the valley road.

Here she came on a group of folks at the mouth of a gully, burning out some limestone for the lime. But their axes lay idle, and no one was minding the pile rearing its brilliant crest of flames in the dark. A common curiosity huddled them all into a close knot which was silhouetted against the orange flare.

Nancy pushed her way in among them.

"What is the matter?" she asked as one with authority.

"It's a letter —"

"— to all us folks."

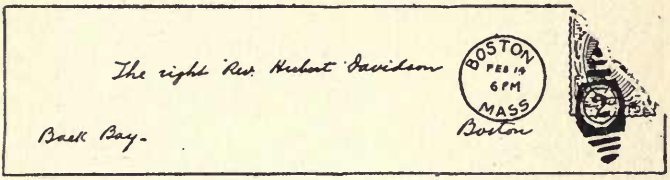
"— about you."

" — from somebody who calls hisse'f David."

Nancy snatched the white sheet from the man who was laboriously trying to read it aloud. She did not even turn to the beginning but commenced to read where her eyes first fell.

" When her father and mother died they gave her to me. She is the most precious thing I have. It is because she loves you that I am letting her stay there; but I charge you to watch over and keep her for me; and God will bless you in doing it, even as He has richly blessed me in her.

" Hubert Davidson."



Right Reverend Hubert Davidson. Dear —

I don't know what to call you. I am a little afraid of you to-night, with the joyful fear of a beautiful vision. So you are David!

Are you really David? Then as a lonely child I have kicked my cousins in the shins in your name and cried myself to sleep with your name between the sobs. And now a grown girl I hold out both my hands to you.

I shall try harder for your sake to grow such a woman as mother was.

Annie Laird Lynn.

February 12.

Dear Doc,

You remember the silver-mounted medicine case you sent me just before I came out. You will be interested to know its fate. But first I'll have to explain a bit.

The situation here is grave, with an inevitable crisis not so many years ahead. It is a big country with undeveloped mines and a considerable market for trade. England and Russia are each trying to reach in and get a hand clutched before the rest of the world wakes up to what they have been doing. On account of the suzerainty of China over Tibet, our staff superintends its military and foreign affairs, while its civil and religious departments are in the hands of a cabinet of priests. These priests distrust the Chinese, so between the two departments there

is little coöperation; in fact, smothered hostility. From the first I have maintained that this is the gravest peril; that it is necessary at all costs to establish internal peace founded on confidence and fair play.

To accomplish this our department needs to win over the backing of the priesthood. There are two Holy Men; though, as a matter of fact, since his flight before the English, the Dalai Lama does not count with the people. That leaves only the Tashi Lama. He is what the Pope is to the Romanists, only he controls a greater number of people and controls them more entirely because they are so blackly ignorant. He resides here at Shigatse. I chose this town instead of Lhassa, where the other Chinese governor is stationed, in hopes of opening a way towards effecting a union.

On our arrival both the Governor and I sent messengers of state asking for audiences but received no recognition. I came near to accepting this move as blocked, but yesterday, to my great satisfaction, the Tashi Lama's chief munshi came with the announcement that he would give me an audience to-day. The escort

arrived for me about mid-morning. We rode up the mountain for a quarter of an hour, came to the main entrance in the wall surrounding the lamasery, dismounted and proceeded on foot through a village of monastery buildings to the Tashi Lama's dwelling. His chief secretary received me in a room full of idols in cases of solid gold. He is a man with a manner of solemn dignity and conviction, helped out by his gorgeous robes.

From there we went into a dim main hall where we waited the summons. Through a central opening in the high ceiling the daylight crept in. In the shadows along the walls stood cases of gold. At the far end of the hall were idols before which stood a long table with sacrificial offerings, lamps and burning incense. Now and then bareheaded, barefooted lamas in red togas crept around to snuff the lamps and set the incense sticks straight. I tell you, Doc, the overpowering mystery of such a place in time could drug a man.

Finally we were summoned and made our way along stone corridors to the anteroom where the secretary whispered in my ear to prepare myself;

then he left. The door ahead swung open. For a minute I couldn't see a thing.

In there I found a man.

In contrast to the magnificence we had been through, here was a great, bare room, half roofed over and half open to the sky like a yard. There were no idols, no furniture; just the stone floor. In one of the window recesses was fixed a bench and on this sat a figure in the coarse red garments of his humblest monks.

I bowed in the doorway and advanced until I stood before the bench where sat the most venerated person in the whole world. Imagine my surprise to find him a young man of my own age. It took me some time to grasp this because of his smile—the most penetrating, the gentlest smile I have ever seen on a man's face.

He held out both hands and motioned me to be seated on a bench near. Then he began to talk through the interpreter. He inquired about our journey in from China, about America and about the countries of Europe, especially about their kings and emperors. He was so simple, sitting there in his window recess and looking out over the valley of Shigatse, that it was hard to

keep in mind that he has more power than any king on earth. He governs the thoughts of all the Buddhists.

We had the Tibetan ceremony of tea drinking and exchanged gifts. He is believed by the people to be the reincarnation of the great doctor, Tsong Kapas, so I had brought your medicine case as the most appropriate article in my possession to offer. While I held it in my hands explaining its parts, he held both of his underneath them. As we bent over it together, such is his gentleness and simplicity, it seemed merely that we were two young men of an age interested for the time in the same thing.

I repeatedly rose to leave but each time he motioned me to be seated, until I had been there three hours. He has ordered another audience for next week.

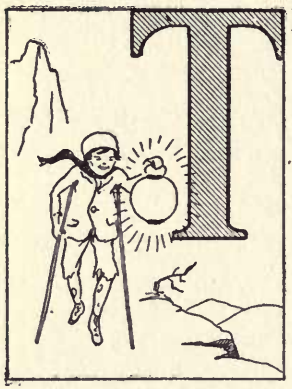
Of course it stands for a good deal politically but I don't seem to focus on that phase of it yet. That extraordinary quiet man up there lays hold upon one personally. He braces one to go ahead and do things. And primarily he gives one poise; a determination to slough off whatever engenders bitterness. "If thy right hand

offend thee, cut it off," is the thought his presence seems to breathe.

I wish you could have been there.

Here's to the success of the thing you want most.

Very truly yours,
John Carter.



THE year wore on towards spring. It was different now that Nancy was really the "worker" in Swaggerty. As Mrs. Crubb had said, for three months she had merely played a game, just as she had played games all her life. But now when she tried to pray — she was not very good at it — she put her face into her hands and then found herself repeating that she had Swaggerty to lead for a year. It quieted her. The doctor understood the difference. Instead of setting her tasks among his sick, he kept begging her not to work so hard.

But the people did not realize that she had changed, for her feet still danced in the sunshine and her quick, glad young laughter sounded up and down the mountain road. That was, perhaps, most of all the miracle that she worked, for Swaggerty became a center of happiness, of

good will. This was the rumor of it that spread abroad throughout the county. The little mountain children, who had never known what or how to play, had singsong games to weave and chant in the sunshine. Their elders caught the habit of joviality over their work. The mail carrier began to smile expectantly when he turned into the long road down Swaggerty Valley. Even the doctor no longer hurried through but would sit sideways in his saddle and laugh until the settlement rang.

Marget was one of Nancy's especial friends, a big woman with the complexion and eyes of a girl. She was twenty-eight and had seven children whom she managed without any particular sense of responsibility. You could hear her a quarter of a mile down the road, laughing carefreely or singing out of tune at the top of her voice. For one whole day she and Nancy amused themselves in off moments by stealing Aunt Hiley Ann's preserves. Besides Marget, Aunt Hiley Ann had another daughter with whose help they so arranged it that each time they would be caught just as they were departing with the jars.

" They're such foolish little jokes," said Nancy to the doctor almost beseechingly. " But these are my children and it's just a little woman-knack of making them happy. I do it just as a mother puts her hands up before her face and plays ' Boo.' "

Swaggerty took the Bishop's charge to care for her literally. One day a man who came down from off the ridge was ordered out of the settlement for " profane cussin' and swearin'."

" It's not for the like of Miss Nancy's ears and we won't have it in Swaggerty," they said.

" Sometimes I feel sorry for the Crusty Old Person," thought Nancy. " I wish I could take him among the cabins and show him that after all, life with all its efforts and ambitions is just our chance of winning love."

About a mile down the road a steep gully cuts down the side of the ridge, meeting the highway at right angles. It is a barren, worthless tract, with scrub trees growing among its profitless ledges and a tiny thread of water trickling down in the steep, sharp bed of it. Here in a kind of sub-settlement by themselves lived Betsy Jane Skidmore and three other families of her kind.

Aunt Hiley Ann and Marget represented social position but Nancy Lynn clung equally to the gully folk. They were crop-sharers; that is, they owned no land but squatted in the hollow and worked on shares anywhere up and down the mountains.

The imaginations of the gully folk took for their special possession Nancy's aunt, Mrs. Amelia Crubb, raising her to dizzy heights of elegance. It came through Nancy's giving one of their children a red-globed lantern such as Mrs. Crubb used to decorate the verandas of her summer home. He was a sorry little chap with a hip disease. When all the other children trooped off with their elders into the fields to crop it or up into the mountain to break ground, he stayed alone in the gully crippling over the rocks. It kept Nancy anxious for fear he might stumble on the ledges when he was alone in the early morning dark. This lantern was so light that he could carry it in his hand against the stick of his crutches. It wrung her heart to see him, with his new feeling of possession and expansion, lording it over the gully.

The morning she carried it up to him they

sat side by side on the doorstep of his home, for all the world like two rock birds on the edge of a high-perched nest. The land fairly slid away from under their feet in the dizzy slope it made to the valley. When they raised their eyes and set them to level gazing, it was like taking flight into a sky filled with purple mountain-heads.

As they sat thus, warming themselves in the noon sunshine, she told him the story of how her Aunt Crubb had many such lights as the one he held swung down in between his knees, and how on summer evenings she hung them up in rows around her house.

A couple of days later when Betsy Jane Skidmore dropped in to pay Nancy a visit, this story returned to her, like bread cast on the waters; but so thoroughly had it been adapted to the conditions of gully life, so clipt of wing, that Nancy scarcely recognized it. In the center of an extra large log house sat Mrs. Amelia Crubb in a straight-backed, splint-bottomed chair in a state of extreme elegance, too haughty even to cross the floor and poke her own back-log. Betsy Jane went so far as to put it, "or knock the ashes out'n of her own pipe." The four walls

about her were starred with colored lanterns. They could not conceive of anyone's hanging them on the outside of a house.

Every evening for many nights this one little red-globed light was hung on a peg and as many of the gully folks as could crowd into the cabin, sat down to look at it in imitation of Mrs. Crubb.

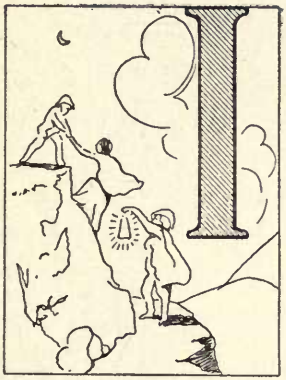
"Just listen," commanded Mrs. Crubb; and read the Bishop an account of it. This picture of herself amused Mrs. Crubb.

"'Too proud to knock the ashes out'n her own pipe,'" she chuckled with appreciation. Yet somehow she was flattered.

"You might call me the cherubim of the gully. Their idea of me is just about as close as the cherubim come to reality. But think of that child telling them about me!" she added wistfully.

"Let me tell you what I have been thinking over lately, Bishop. To build —" here Mrs. Crubb went off into a rehearsal of plans. "It would cost about —" and she gave a schedule of sums which showed that she had already been consulting some professional. "I'm going to make Mr. Williams help me. We two could do it and never miss the money. The next time

your Miss Schuyler comes to the city, bring her over and I'll call Mr. Williams and we'll talk the matter over with her."



IT WAS a wild black night with a hurricane of wind blowing down the valley. Nancy drew the curtain aside and peered out, but not a single light gleamed back at her from the blackness.

"I must be the only one astir in the settlement," she thought.

She drew her table out into the center of the room and set herself to cutting out some sewing. She was not often nervous but that night — possibly because of the all-predominating rush of the wind down Swaggerty Valley — a sense of apprehension and a womanish craving for strong arms of protection dried her eyeballs and tightened at the muscles of her throat.

She was working with her face towards the firelight and her back to the storm. With a sudden flap the door behind her swung open and a draft of wind rushed past her up the chimney

flue. She turned quickly to close it so that the smoke would not be sucked back into the room, and found herself confronting two strange men. Back in there, folks enter a house without knocking.

"What do you want?" she demanded apprehensively.

"Old Pete Crodell is sick. He wants you to come pray over him."

Pete Crodell was a mountain roustabout, one of those insidious middle-aged characters who cling on to the spirit of youth and by some personal charm make themselves the moving spirit in the carousals of their juniors. The doings and the misdoings of him and his followers were known to Nancy by report. But the mountain mind is a breeding place for sudden religious spasms; so she felt no further mistrust.

Slipping on a long coat to shield her from the storm, Nancy Lynn lighted her lantern and went with the two strangers down the big road. They kept it for two miles along the valley and then began to climb the ridge up the cleft of an old washout. The night was of the thick blackness into which one would put out the hand to feel

a way as along a blind wall. A sudden heightening of the wind at times seemed to snatch the very breath out of the mouth and rush away with it. The trail up the old torrent bed was merely a succession of jagged, unexpected footholds. Here the lantern was an imperative necessity. Because she needed both hands for climbing, one of the men carried it for her, holding it low so as to show her places to set her feet. Sometimes when they came to the flat face of a precipice, she gave him both her hands to help her up. So at last they topped the ridge and set their feet into an easy winding path. Then she saw she was being led to " the pond."

Up where the mountain-tops cluster together like low, rounded hills lies a shallow pond of water and about it, in the pockets of the hills, are three or four cabins. The last moonshining — and consequently the high carousing of the immediate section — was carried on here. The Swaggerty folk knew all about it and sometimes late in the night they heard young fellows screaming and shooting down their valley from the pond. But the mountain folk never interfere with one another's affairs.

In the wild blackness before them, Nancy saw a red square of firelight that designated the open door of a house. As they neared it, she could even see the play of the firelight on the walls and catch the urge of voices. This picture ahead of them, like something anticipated, filled one of her two guides with haste and elation. The other — the one that had carried her lantern and helped her climb the gully — stopped, foot-still, in the path.

" I say, Miss — " he began penitently.

The silhouette of a man came anticipatingly into the glare of the door and the volume of voices increased. Nancy was swept along into the house as though a demon of the wild night had laid hands on her and pushed her in.

The hearth was piled dangerously high with firewood and Nancy Lynn stood blinking in the middle of the room until the sudden hurt of the light in her eyes eased down. Then, backed around the walls of the room, she discovered a solid phalanx of strange men, grinning at her, and she knew that she was caught in the trap of some horrible mountain joke.

" Here's the man what wants you to pray over

him," said one from along the wall, impatient for the fun to begin.

A loud guffaw followed his remark.

He kicked forward. Nancy followed the direction indicated by his boot and looked down. Against her very feet lay old Pete Crodell, dead drunk. His coat had been put on him wrong side out; chicken feathers had been twisted into his hair; one half of his face had been blackened with charred wood and the other half painted red with mountain clay.

" He's the man who wants you to pray over him," repeated a voice at her back. They seemed obsessed with this one sentence.

Nancy turned her head in the direction of the last speaker and in so doing, swept with a glance a whole half circle of them, their eyes focused on her, their faces leering.

The line of men had now shifted across the doorway. The only spot of refuge free from them was the hearth, blazing high with flames. Nancy shrank towards this, cowering before the sudden revelation flung up into her very face of the polluting depths of hellishness that exist in human nature.

A low laugh ran round the circle.

At the sound something — whether anger or fear or courage — rose within her. She slipped off the long coat she wore and threw it over Pete Crodell, covering him from head to feet and blotting out from sight one object of their wild, cruel humor. Thus she stood, its sole victim. Then she stretched out her trembling hands above him and prayed.

Nancy Lynn did not know what words she used any more than she knew what was the next step they had planned for their terrible comedy. Even while she spoke, horrible black rumors of things done in the drunken mountain frolics filled her mind. She caught the play of the firelight on the white dress she wore and remembered with a pang the half-burnt taper in the Bishop's library.

In their midst, with hands outstretched, Nancy Lynn pleaded the cause of them that mocked.

The grimaces died on their faces, like lights blown out. She heard a half-drunken sob beside her.

"And me — oh, save me, too!" she cried suddenly, closing her fingers over her palms con-

vulsively; and darted between them out into the night.

Flying down the footpath, she brushed against the man with the lantern. His stomach had sickened of the joke and he had not gone inside.

"Wait, wait, miss. I'll see you get back safe."

She ran only the faster from the sound of his voice, her feet catching and stumbling. Her one blind desire was for home. He strode along, keeping pace with her and swinging the light so that the rays fell before her feet. When they came to the gorge, he held out his hand and she put hers into it, though she could not have spoken to him. She half ran, half slipped down the old torrent bed, so that she was bruised and torn before she reached its foot. As soon as she dropped down into the big road with Swaggerty ahead, she began to run again as though she were alone.

When he handed the lantern back to her at her door, he said repentantly,

"Us fellows hate it that we plagued you. You needn't be feered of us nary again."

But it was all too fresh for assurances to salve. She threw herself face down on her bed, her eyes

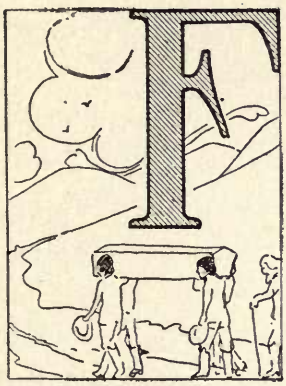
hidden in her arms, and lay there till daybreak.

By that time Swaggerty had heard the news and gathered at her door in a wrathful group.

" And us promised him we'd take care of her," sobbed Aunt Hiley Ann.

The men wanted to ride at once up the ridge and do some shooting; but standing pale in the doorway before them, Nancy insisted on their civic responsibility; that they should forget her and think only of the welfare of the section. Swaggerty was bent on having the moonshining center raided, but agreed to leave it to the courts. It was a new state of mind for Swaggerty, but she held them to it.

" Perhaps I have given them a bad case of self-righteousness," she thought. " They are stepping high and looking down on less law-abiding settlements."



FOR a week Aunt Hiley Ann had been ailing. The doctor from Salt Lick and Nancy fought shoulder to shoulder but this time without avail. One morning she died and that afternoon they buried her.

By one o'clock the fence across the road held a row of grizzled men, whittling solemnly and gazing unswervingly in through the open door at the preparation. Nancy's place was over by the doorstep with the women and children. At last Betsy Jane Skidmore thrust her head out and beckoned. The men slid down off the fence, closing their jackknives with a snap. The women hushed the little children against their breasts. A solemn hush fell over all.

The coffin, nailed over with an old black dress skirt, passed out the door through an aisle of waiting folk, and turned up the road, borne on

the shoulders of four men. The rest dropped into an irregular line behind it, swaying from foot to foot because of the slow pace it set them. They were awe-struck, all of them, by the mystery of the thing that moved ahead.

Suddenly, like the snap of a pistol, a shriek arose, then another and another. The swayings of the marching people grew wilder. A low moan rumbled in their throats, gathering volume and rhythm. A voice in high falsetto broke out into a fierce dirge and others followed. It was a frantic, primitive lament rising naked to Heaven in jagged, precipitous notes, with ominous pauses, tightening the throat.

" We are traveling to the grave
For to lay this body down.
Our fathers say they're happy,
Oh, they're happy in the Lord!
For the last time that we heard them speak
'Twas about their Heavenly home,
'Twas about their Heavenly home.
Oh, the new Jerusalem."

The coffin was brought to a halt along the road; someone let down the bars and they began

climbing a steep mountain slope where one must husband the breath. The singing stopped. They climbed up the slippery, sunburnt grass and over the ledges, minding their steps until in the corner of an airy clearing they came upon a burying-place.

There they found a man standing up to his shoulders in an open grave. He had thrown his mattock out on the mound of new earth and was eating an early apple from the tree above him. The people set down the coffin and seated themselves around on the rocks, waiting while he nipped the last bite off the core and tossed it backward over his shoulder. A branch broken from the apple tree measured the coffin and the grave, which was found short. Swaggerty focused its interest on the practical and watched while all was made fit.

Then once again they turned from the commonplace and faced death. The coffin lay open on the ground, the kinfolk kneeling about it. A mountain exhorter stood over them and preached. It was unguided ignorance looking up into the face of God leaning close down above them.

Gray rainclouds, gathering, festooned them-

selves from mountain-top to mountain-top. Lifting his perspiring face, the mountain exhorter discovered these.

"Folkses, it's going to rain," he exclaimed. "We must hurry about this. If any of you want to look your last at her, come on."

With the contracting circle Nancy Lynn drew near. There on a patched bedquilt, her sunbonnet on her head, lay Aunt Hiley Ann. Along beside her lay her knife, her pipe and some bits of candy. Nancy turned away with a tightening at her heart. There lay one who had been her friend.

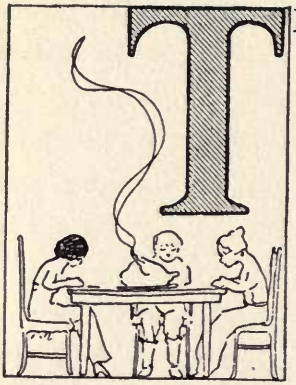
Through the long, slant rain they groped their way back down the mountain-side, leaving Aunt Hiley Ann swung into her grave on runners of wild grapevine. The rush of the storm was still beating down upon it when Nancy Lynn reached her own lonely cabin. She found the fire out on the hearth and the room cold and smelling of ashes. Not even a letter from David, as she now called the Bishop, could make the place cheerful. She stirred the embers until a few blue tongues of flame shot up. Then she rose and looked quickly about her as though

somewhere present in the chill damp of the place stood a Crusty Old Person.

" Our chance to live before we go down to the grave, that is what we all ask," she cried rebelliously. " No one has the right to take that away from us humans. It is what we are here for. There is nothing in all eternity that can make up for the loss of loving down here on the green fields of earth."

She threw out both her hands appealingly.

" Why mayn't I climb the heights to my great man and build a little fire at his feet so when he is tired he can bend and warm his hands beside mine! How has anyone the right to tell me that I must not! "



THE months rolled by and brought again the season of tawny, sunburnt grass and low-hanging hazes.

One morning Nancy opened her eyes while day was still purple. She stretched up her arms, rejoicing in a little wakening strain that ran along them.

"It's Thanksgiving Day," she cried.

When she had done combing her hair, she leaned towards the glass, giving the braids a few last pats into shape.

"And my David will slip his sanctified feet under somebody's dinner table and eat somebody's turkey. Being a bishop, he'll probably have the white meat."

She drew a quick, anticipative breath and resolved to keep the whole day for herself. To Nancy Lynn, even being selfish carried with it a sense of adventure.

In the early morning she closed her door behind her with a pleasant, running-away-from-school excitement and leaving Swaggerty behind climbed up across an open field of broom sedge. At a cabin which stood in front of the lowest fringe of timber, she stopped long enough to snuggle the newest settlement baby. Its mother greeted her eagerly with the news that they had named it Castoria. She had found the name on a bottle and thought it pretty.

Nancy allowed that it was. "And it encourages such a breadth of selection. 'Vanilla' would be good, or 'Tapioca.'"

Then up, up, up, she climbed among the timbered ledges, the dried leaves singing underfoot, the water oaks and gum trees rustling their brown leaves against her shoulders, the crisp, blue, friendly sky looking down into her face between the pillars of stark timber. By mid-morning the rises and dips of the trail brought her to where Betsy Jane Skidmore's house stood with one foot swung rakishly over the bluff of the gully.

Betsy Jane exclaimed softly with delight when she saw her coming. Being an early riser, she

was just setting out her midday meal. As they two together spread out hoecake, molasses, buttermilk and dried beans cooked in lard, Nancy smiled to herself, rejoicing with a kind of deep-seated joy, as though it were a pleasant secret, that this was to be her Thanksgiving dinner. She had a knife and spoon to eat with; Betsy had a fork and Timothy, the son, used his jackknife. It was not at all bad, except for the taste of raw lard in the beans.

"And that's a mere trifle," thought Nancy expansively. "All one has to do is to specialize on hoecake."

They lingered long over the scrapings of molasses on their plates, for she and Betsy Jane had so many things close to their hearts to talk about.

A rollicsome spirit filled Nancy Lynn that morning. She grasped her knife and spoon, one in each hand, like an unmannered three-year-old and beat a noisy tattoo up the table in the direction of Betsy Jane.

"This is Thanksgiving Day!" she cried jubilantly.

"What's that?"

"It's a Yankee day, when we stop and count our blessings. What are your blessings, Betsy Jane?"

"We-ell," deliberately, "I reckon that this here valley is the civilizest country of any to live in. You hear of shootin's and killin's all 'round. You can't have a newspaper read to you that you don't hear about 'em. But we haven't any sich goin's on. Folks is all alike 'round here. All we want is something to eat and something to wear. I'd like a good dress to put on but if I ain't got it, it don't worry me none. I tells myself you might just as well keep handy and happy with the Lord as to drag along 'cause of sich."

Nancy's eyes glowed on her with appreciation.

Betsy Jane warmed up to the subject of blessings.

"And I hear Preacher MacDonald has a new call," she gossiped.

"A fine, big one!" replied Nancy, who had secretly bespoken it from the Bishop.

"He's a likely young exhorter but looks like he took a turn and this here climate didn't seem to agree with him."

"No," agreed Nancy profoundly. "And now

listen, Betsy Jane, while I tell you my latest blessing!"

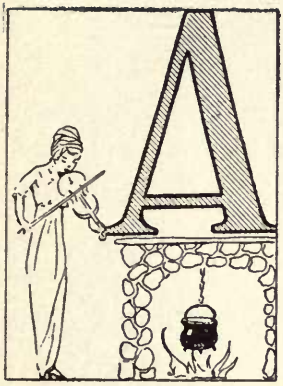
She went on eagerly to relate how the Bishop had written her that he was going to send a friend of his in to visit her. "She can stay only a fortnight," he wrote, "but I think the companionship will do you good. She has just returned from abroad, where she has been studying music, and I suggested that she bring her violin in with her."

"After Europe I don't know how I shall manage to entertain her; but it will be so cozy to have another girl facing me across the table. I grow so enthusiastic planning for her."

"So that's why you are so happy to-day," said Betsy Jane Skidmore shrewdly.

Nancy nodded her chin and beat two noisy little fists on the table again.

"Yes, that's why I am so happy," she cried joyfully.



AS THE doctor rode along Swaggerty Valley in the windy dusk, the flare of Nancy's hearth shining through the windows beckoned him off his horse. In response to his knock, came the cheerful lilt of Nancy's voice.

Inside he stopped short. There was the log-sided room whose every detail he knew by heart, the rag rugs, the few bright pictures pinned against the walls, the two blue platters on the hearth-shelf. That night he found there a strange young woman with a figure moulded in long, lithe, deliberate lines. Her poise was the expression of an unconsciously conscious feeling of her personal distinction. It suggested that she was in the midst of her surroundings but not of them, as a princess of the blood is trained to hold herself.

The doctor from Salt Lick looked quickly

around the room to make sure that it held for him Nancy's good comradeship. He found her buttoned up in a long apron, kneeling before the fireplace at some cooking.

"Good evening, Sunnyside." That was his name for Nancy.

She sprang to her feet, holding out a hand.

"You'll have to take the left one. The other's smudgy."

After he had been presented to Margaret Lincoln, they two stood looking down upon Nancy browning turnovers in a hearth baker. Nancy, with her head bent down, was secretly smiling with pride. She had never before seen the doctor in the role of a society man and she felt a sense of personal gratification in his ease and surety of manner.

"He never did that for me," she thought with a chuckle not unlike her Aunt Crubb's.

Miss Lincoln had one arm outstretched in a delicate curve, so that it rested by the merest touch of the fingertips upon the mantel. She bent slightly so as to follow Nancy's movements.

A fireplace baker is made with three iron legs

so as to stand in a bed of hot embers drawn forward upon the hearth-rock. Its cover has a basin-like depression into which hot coals are shoveled from time to time so that it will get an even heat above and below.

"It is like making mud pies," suggested Miss Lincoln, watching Nancy filling a fresh supply of embers into the cover.

Nancy lifted a flushed face.

"Yes," she agreed cordially, "only there's more responsibility — and it's warmer," rubbing the back of her wrist across her forehead.

"Here, let me lift that for you," said the doctor, reaching for the pothooks.

He removed the cover and they bent their heads together and peered in.

"Done."

"Done."

They two were versed in fireplace cooking.

"How interesting," said Miss Lincoln.

"They taste good," answered the doctor, hanging the pothooks back on their nail.

But the meal that followed was not in all respects a success. Society life is made up of social rites, which are a passing good substitute

for the real thing — life. The chance meals the doctor and Nancy had eaten together in that little room had been made gracious and orderly by a feeling of comradeship; but by some strange alchemy Miss Lincoln managed to convert this dinner into a social rite. Every time Nancy lifted her teacup, she set it down gingerly lest it should rattle. And yet she had conceived a genuine admiration for the stranger. When Nancy was not waiting on her, she was covertly admiring her and her clothes. Simple as Miss Lincoln's dress was, it was a wonderful revelation of her figure and her personality. Nancy had forgotten that there were such clothes.

Miss Lincoln and the doctor talked easily of Europe, where each had done considerable traveling.

"But I have just come back from the East. I have been spending a little time in Japan."

"Oh, did you go to China?" cried Nancy.

"Yes. I had such interesting letters of introduction that I went over for a little while. The Bishop got them for me. I was surprised to find —" here she turned her attention from the doctor to Nancy — "what a man of influ-

ence, secular influence, the Bishop is. I had understood, of course, that he is widely known; but I had always thought of him merely as an ecclesiastic. But I have been discovering that he has influence in educational affairs and in matters of state. He has a large circle of influence in appointing young men to fill different positions. They tell me that he is extremely severe in his exactions. They say he recommends none but absolutely the right man for the right place and that when once he has used his influence for a young fellow he is really merciless in the way he holds him up to standard. Ultimately, of course, it is best for the man and for progress in general."

Nancy's cheeks flushed. It sounded like a criticism of her Bishop.

"I have never found him exacting," she answered.

"These gentle souls are apt to be severe," generalized Miss Lincoln, dismissing that phase of the subject.

She smiled upon Nancy with an extra touch of sweetness in her aloofness.

"I am engaged to one of his cousins. That

is why he has taken such an interest in me."

"You have my good wishes," answered Nancy genuinely. "Mine always follow where the Bishop's go."

Miss Lincoln now turned to the doctor. She managed, somehow, to convey an impression of gentle reproof to Nancy, as though she felt that their conversation had grown over-personal and had excluded him.

"I ran over to Japan to prepare for the coming season. I have my first engagement to sing in opera this winter — a Japanese theme — and I thought it well to go and get the local color."

Miss Lincoln was too much of a woman of culture to say this egotistically. She was offering it as interesting conversation. She gave a quick sketch of the plot of the opera.

"Would you like to get an idea of the music?" she asked graciously, rising and glancing towards her violin. While they two drew the table back against the wall, she tuned her instrument, fingering it lovingly. Nancy turned out the lights. Miss Lincoln fitted the violin under her chin and touched two or three first bird-notes

from it with her fingers. She moved dreamily towards the hearthside through the great rays of light and shadow which fanned across the ceiling and walls. Then the notes of her music began to rise through them, filling the room with the mingled beauties of sight and sound. Now and then she sang softly as she played.

For an hour, as one wrapt, Nancy Lynn listened and looked. This young woman was a product of human culture, a generalization. Her form was corseted into lines that represented a generalization of womanly beauty. The expression of her face was held in a generalized graciousness and repose. The very artistic emotions that floated upward on the wings of her music were generalizations of human experience. For the time being Nancy lost sight of the fact that God, who stands beyond human culture, is a particularizer. She felt rustic in her individualized interest in Marget and Betsy Jane and Betsy Jane's son, Timothy.

When the doctor rose to leave, Nancy followed him out into the dooryard.

"Doctor-man," she said with a shake of the head, "you and Swaggerty and the good Bishop

have been making me vain; but I'm cured. I'm stubby and over-enthusiastic and I give instead of accepting. It isn't ladylike."

The doctor took this for a joke and laughed.

"Yes," she continued convincedly, "only this morning on the upper trail Mittie Jeems stopped me and said, 'Law, I don't see how you can stand it to comb your hair every day. It almost kills me to comb mine once a month.' I can look back now and see that I actually felt flattered. And just look at it!" she cried, rumpling it viciously under her two palms so that a mist of little curls came tumbling down around her face.

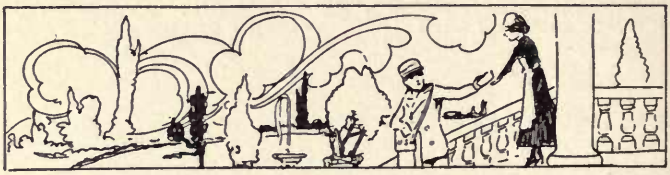
She drew him forward a couple of steps so that he could look with her through the window at the girl within.

"That's the way it ought to be done. I glory in her. If I were a man I'd be wild about her."

"Would you?" he answered. "I wouldn't."

The two girls left alone together, talked for an hour in the wavering firelight, seeking common interests and reaching out tendrils of friendliness. Then the fire had died down to a glowing bed of embers. While Miss Lincoln packed her violin back in its case, Nancy slipped into

the guest chamber to fold down the bed covers. There on the dressing table, amid a litter of toilet articles, stood the photographs of two men — the Bishop and John Carter.



My dear Bishop,

You could not help it, either of you — I know that — because she is lovely. I don't blame you; Oh, I don't! But why didn't you tell me before you sent her in?

I am going to run away from Swaggerty. It is cowardly, but I don't care. I guess I've used up all my pluck.

I —

How would I have hindered his progress more than she? And why haven't you told me that you are the Crusty Old Person?

I played you a square game.

Nancy Lynn.

HY, what is the matter?" exclaimed the doctor a couple of mornings later when he stopped for a few minutes in Swaggerty Valley.

He closed a lean brown hand over Nancy's wrist and drew her off into the sunshine at the side of the house.

"Now tell me all about it."

The sunshine was clear, unfriendly and pitilessly revealing. It poked its fingers along the clay daubed in between the logs of the house-walls, hunting for places where the mud had begun to fall out in ragged chunks. It threw a searchlight on the hard-baked earth of the door-yard, bald of any single spear of grass. It showed where the chickens had scratched for worms and where they had burrowed holes in the yard in which to dust and sun themselves.

"Now tell me all about it."

"I'm jealous," whispered Nancy huskily. "She's stolen my bishop and my diplomat."

"There is a bishop, of course; but do you really mean there is a — "

Nancy's eyes welled full of tears.

Brusque man as he was, work among his sick had taught him the tenderness of a woman. The doctor took Nancy's face between his two hands comfortingly, as though she might have been a child; but as he looked down into it, gradually his own grew tense. He bent and kissed her once on the hair just above the line of the forehead.

The doctor's practice was shamelessly neglected the fortnight following. He brought over one of his saddle horses and left it in Swaggerty for Miss Lincoln's use. They spent hours together in a sheltered nook in the bottom land where the creek flows through the settlement. Here she brought her violin and played for him. Swaggerty watched with an interest, not altogether approving.

"The doctor seems to have taken a loving for the foreign woman," they commented, "and we all thought he had fixed his heart on Miss Nancy."

In this way Miss Lincoln was in the cabin with Nancy only long enough to eat and sleep; and at last a morning dawned when the doctor drove her out of the valley to the railroad.

Then Nancy dragged out her trunk and began taking her pictures down from the walls. It was slow work, for she moved listlessly. She made innumerable journeys from her bookshelves, her dressing table, her clothespress, to the open trunk. Sometimes she seated herself on the edge of it, wondering where to go with it when finally she had it packed. Evening found her still at her task.

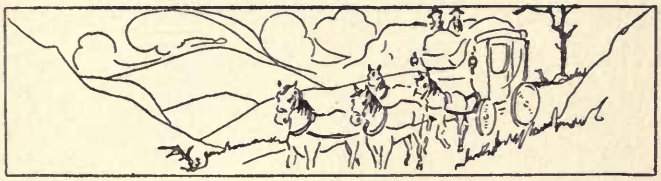
Then Betsy Jane Skidmore came bustling excitedly in with the news that Marget's boy was dying; so Nancy left everything and went.

She found the dusky little cabin blurred with awe-struck faces and stifling with the odor of human bodies. For the first time since she had been in the mountains her whole soul revolted.

They had the little fellow terrified. Oh, why do people make things that cannot possibly be helped, harder than they have to be! She made them all move back against the walls and knelt down by the bedside, lifting the little fellow into

her arms. She could not have said to him the solemn things they wanted of her. His was only a little bud of a soul and she could not pry it open with her fingers. So she told him in whispers about Boy Blue and Bo-peep and about the sleepy sheep that come over the hill, over the hill. One by one they watched them over the brow and down the slope until he raised himself with a little shudder and fell back dead in her arms.

Nancy would not have lost control of herself if she had not been so very tired. Then, too, the Bishop had hurt more deeply than she knew. With her arms stretched out across that little dead baby she sobbed aloud. She could hear the people shuffle back from her against the wall, whispering. She cried and cried until she felt that her heart broke. After that one doesn't cry. When she staggered to her feet it was all different. She had let go her hold on every dream she had ever dreamed since first she hugged a doll up in her arms. As she stumbled across the room with her hands held out to Marget, the mother, it did not seem to matter much where she went or where she stayed.



My dear Bishop,

I am sorry I was rude to you. You did play square.

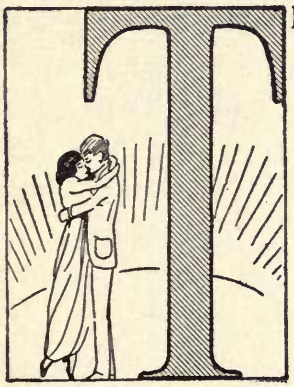
At first when I discovered that you are the one who forced me to give him up, it made my hands unsteady and my head dizzy to think that you would hurt me so. But now I can look at it as a bargain and see that you have kept your half of it. And I give you my word of honor that I have never once failed to keep mine.

When I think of you — and these last days I think of you most all day long — my heart gets shouting up at me that you were honest in it, until I say, " Yes, yes, I know it. Only do keep quiet." It may even be that you did not know it was I, for I wrote only to your secretary. Perhaps he thought I was just a high-tempered girl

and spared you from hearing about my letter. I know I should have saved you all I could.

I'm not going to run away. I'm going to stay right on in Swaggerty. They are so good to me in here.

Annie Lynn.



THE settlement that lies up in the far pocket of the mountain sent a hurried rider down to Nancy Lynn with word that a tree had fallen on Mittie Jeems' husband while he was out logging; so she saddled Wings at once and started on the long climb over the ridge.

On her way down again the darkness overtook her; but she and Wings rode on through it, trusting to their homing instinct to guide them. But when she found Wings standing nose to nose with a cliff she realized that they had strayed off the trail into the timber. She did not dare press on through the blackness, for Wings was such a sentimental old mule with a fondness for hanging musingly over the edge of precipices. As the snakes were numerous that season, the only thing for Nancy Lynn to do was to hitch Wings and climb into the

branches of a tree to spend the night. She made herself as comfortable as possible with her back against the big trunk and her hair coiled around her throat for warmth. It was not so cramping along at first; but as hours wore on she decided with a wry smile that as a matter of practical details, the life of a bird is not all that poets sing it. A host of unused muscles began to feel sore from the long strain of balancing herself.

Through the all-enveloping darkness she heard over the crest of the hill on its opposite slope, the cries of men's voices and the yelping of dogs, so distant that the sounds came to her thin and sweet. It may be that Nancy Lynn dropped off into a doze, for the next thing she knew they had topped the ridge directly above her and she caught the snap of undergrowth and the yip of dogs pottering around on false trails.

Then a hound began to whimper and cry. Nancy knew the meaning of that as well as did the dogs. It was the alarm signal of a fresh scent. Its effect was instant and electric. The hounds bunched and then scattered, heads down, through the underbrush. Instantly the night was filled with frenzied music, the cries of men,

the half-wail, half-yelp of dogs. Down the ridge they came straight for Nancy Lynn. She drew her skirts up about her and peered down into the blackness below her, which had now become a circle of clamoring yelps. As a torch drew near, her eyes picked out of the dark a ring of open red mouths baying up at her excitedly. Then someone thrust a torch up into the branches to see the opossum they had treed.

"Why, it's Miss Nancy! Law, Miss Nancy!" they shouted.

But Nancy Lynn saw only one face among them. She blinked hard, suddenly afraid that she had become a vision-seeing saint. The next minute she slipped down out of the branches into the arms of her dream and found them very real.

"John Carter!" she cried.

It was inconsiderate of the hounds to hit another scent at that particular minute, for the mountaineers were torn between two centers of interest. But the urgent barking of the pack won out and they two were left with only a fourteen-year-old standing open-mouthed under a torch.

Her cheek was pressed against his; they spoke with their lips close together.

"And you cared all the time, Nancy?"

"I've hungered and thirsted for you," she whispered.

"But you told me—"

"That I wanted to wear silk stockings," with a sobbing laugh. "Oh, had they only let me, I would have followed you barefoot over the rocks."

He drew her forward into the circle of torchlight where he could scan each dear, remembered feature.

"They're still just as blue."

"But what brought you in here?"

"You."

Then he began to explain in his thorough way.

"I came out to try to get hold of some maps of Tibet. We have got to get maps of the country. France has some and Germany; and Sweden has nearly a thousand sheets of survey. Then, of course, when I was as near as Sweden, I ran over to the States. But it was really due to a friend of mine over at Salt Lick. He wrote

the Bishop there was some misunderstanding that was wearing on you. You had said something about a secretary and the Bishop got the story from him. And there was I, already on my way home. I came through with the hunters so as not to lose an hour's time in reaching you."

"The doctor!" murmured Nancy.

"As fine a man as walks the earth!"

The note of hearty, untroubled friendship in which these words were spoken told her that neither Carter nor the Bishop had detected the doctor's sacrifice. It was not Nancy Lynn's right to break the man's silence. So this much at least life gave these two to share alone together. Nancy drew away and stared into the darkness in the direction of the lonely man among his books and drugs at Salt Lick.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life —" she whispered to herself. "Oh, before I leave, I must go to him and tell him that I understand; that I, myself, know what that means."

"I have some good news to take Doc," continued Carter, drawing her back to him. "Mrs. Crubb and Mr. Williams are planning to build

a hospital in here and endow it. There are to be two nurses, one for the ward and one to go around among the cabins. They have been planning it out with Miss Schuyler."

The small boy under the torch wished they wouldn't get together that way and whisper.

"And I thought you were going to marry Miss Lincoln," murmured Nancy contentedly.

"But she's engaged to my cousin, Arnold Carter. I sent that photograph to Arnold by Margaret and she kept it around because she thought it looked like him."

The small boy could restrain himself no longer.

"Where y'u goin', Miss Nancy?"

Nancy turned with a quick gasp of surprise.

"Oh!" she said, "I'm going to Tibet for awhile, I suppose. It really doesn't matter where."

Just then the figures of the hunters loomed out of the darkness. Against the black wall of the night they stood in a friendly, curious circle. The dogs nosed a way in between them and lay down on the ground at Nancy's feet, with tongues lolling out.

"Be y'u goin' away from us, Miss Nancy?" asked one of them.

Nancy Lynn looked around upon the ring of mountaineers with a warmth of genuine friendship. She stood lithely straight like a gypsy in the flare of the torch. Deep in her eyes lay a subtle something all her own that beckoned to men, luring them on like an adventure, to the fresh, glad joys of living.

"Yes," she answered. "My feet are in the trail again; only now it is just a long, straight path leading across the world to the sunset."

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